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# MODERN LAODICEANS

*AND OTHER SERMONS*

# MODERN LAODICEANS

## *AND OTHER SERMONS*

**Chiefly preached to Bradfield Boys**

BY THE REV.

HERBERT BRANSTON GRAY, M.A.

WARDEN OF BRADFIELD COLLEGE

RIVINGTONS

*WATERLOO PLACE, LONDON*

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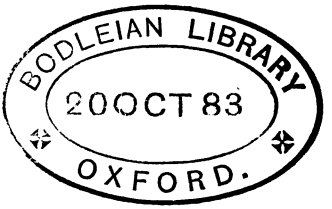
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# PREFACE.

Compositions which are primarily intended for the ear necessarily lose much of their force when presented to the eye. To borrow a metaphor from art, all the perspective, the *chiaroscuro*, the grouping of the picture, brought out by the manner, the intonation, and the local surroundings of the preacher, are robbed of their relative proportion and peculiar distinctness when an attempt is made to reproduce them in print. This is a great but inevitable loss. And so the publication of sermons, with the exception of such as have the character of essays, always seems to need an apology, or at least an explanation.

Some few of the sermons in this volume were addressed to general congregations, but the greater number were delivered to my pupils at Bradfield College at the close of our school service on Sunday evenings; and, composed as they have been, one and

all, in the course of a few hours at the end of a week of engrossing scholastic duties, they betray, I am well aware, all the faults of rapid and *quasi*-extempore compositions. They are published, as they were delivered, "in the rough," without much pretension to logical proportion or elegance of style; their publication being resolved upon for the sake of my pupils, to serve as a memento of the spiritual teaching received in their school days, rather than with the expectation that they will commend themselves to the more discriminating judgment of older readers. They necessarily contain much, both in style and matter, that is adapted for boys alone.

A word of explanation, however, is due to others into whose hands the volume may fall.

To the ordinary public school boy the more detailed exposition of doctrinal truths is, in my opinion, better conveyed by the weekly Scripture lessons, and by lectures to candidates for Confirmation, than by utterances from the pulpit.

Although, therefore, the cardinal truths of Church doctrine are never lost sight of, and are continually emphasized and explained, yet exegesis forms the

foundation rather than the structure of the sermons in this volume.

My aim has always been to give practical lessons —to enforce, by examples and applications, spiritual and moral teaching which may guide my young hearers safely through that most difficult and critical period of their lives, when impulse is always strong and reason often weak, and when the character is being formed with startling rapidity for good or evil.

May God grant that some words at least of mine may not have been spoken in vain; that some seed sown may have fallen on good ground, and may hereafter bring forth abundantly; that the bread I have cast on the waters may be found after many days.

HERBERT BRANSTON GRAY.

BRADFIELD, BERKS,
*July*, 1883.

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# SERMON I.

## Permanence of Character.

PREACHED AT BRADFIELD, FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT, 1881.

"*Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.*"—MATT. xiii. 12.

THIS saying occurs in two passages of the Gospel history: once after the parable of the sower, and again after the parable of the talents.

It is perhaps unfortunate that most commentators in both passages have passed over in silence what, however we may differ in its interpretation, is undoubtedly meant to express and emphasize a moral truth; and it would perhaps help us in our explanation of it, if we made a point of viewing it by the light of the two parables to which it is appended.

Now, what strikes us immediately with reference to both is this: that the soil in the one case, and the servants in the other, come before us with what I may call *formed characters*. The soil is represented

as *already* stony, choked with thorns, trodden into hardness, or as rich and good; the servants are represented as having *already* strong, moderate, and weak or bad characters, when the distribution of the talents in the first instance was made.

According to their relative abilities were the relative amounts of money entrusted to their charge.

Furthermore, notice that in both cases the result seemed a foregone conclusion—nay, the working of a natural or a moral law. Given, Christ seems to say, certain conditions of soil on which to sow seeds, certain fruits or absence of fruits will follow as an invariable law. Given men of certain formed characters, put them into certain positions or under certain conditions of life, and as surely, as indubitably, can we tell how they will act.

Thus far, then, Christ is exemplifying a great truth, as true in the moral as in the natural world: "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit, neither can a good tree bring forth evil fruit."

But in these passages there is, I think, something still further that we can hardly fail to notice, namely, that in each parable the result would seem at first sight out of all proportion to the cause. The seed on the good ground does not merely reproduce itself, but brings forth fruit an hundredfold; and the servant, who sets out with a steadfast purpose to utilize his

opportunities (with, remember, a previously formed character for earnestness and nobility of aim), gains not only what we might naturally expect as the reward of his labour, but also a rich dower of unexpected blessings.

Now, these remarks of mine assume, as you see, quite a different interpretation from the one often, and I suppose ordinarily, accepted, which takes the soil in the former parable, and the talents in the latter, to mean the natural gifts with which a man is endowed by birth or by transmission.

Such an interpretation, however, has, as it seems to me, two fatal objections. First, that it does not correspond with the picture presented to us in the parable. The picture presented is surely that of a set of men who by their *previous actions* had earned a greater or less proportion of trust to be reposed in them by their master; and of a soil which, by previous tillage or neglect, had already become, before the seed was sown, bad or good. And the second, still more fatal objection, I think, to such interpretation is, that it represents Christ as teaching that the development of religious life and its rewards depend *entirely* on the qualities which we inherit or possess at birth, and not on any exertions of our own; a doctrine which, I venture to think, would stifle religious life, and could not at any rate be assumed to be the teaching of Christ.

No, surely! it is of formed, not unformed, characters of which the parable speaks, and which the twice-told saying of our Lord emphasizes when He says, "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath."

So, then, we gather from the meaning of the text this truth: that as a man grows older, his character becomes more and more fixed; that more and more surely can we predict his line of action, and tone of thought, from what they have been in the past; that he who in character is worthy of five talents will so develop in goodness and nobility of soul, that he will, when he has to give account of his stewardship, be worthy, morally and religiously speaking, of five talents more; but that he who is only worthy of one talent—that is, he in whom, by reason of sloth and carelessness and disobedience in early years, the spiritual and moral life has become feeble and petty and worthless—will in after life leave to rust and neglect even the little goodness he possesses, so that it will be at last taken away from him for ever.

Let us, then, take as the subject of our thoughts this evening, the tremendous importance for time and eternity of the formation of character, believing that we can trace this as the true signification underlying the parable of which our text forms the sequel and the moral; and if I speak in more general terms than

usual, you will understand that it is on account of the special circumstances in which we are here this evening.

Perhaps one of the most solemn moments in life, both to you and to me, is an occasion like this, when there is a pause in our school existence, when some among you may be bidding farewell to the quiet and stillness here, and be passing out into the great battle-ground of life. Here, we say, to-night, is another leaf turned over from the book of your life; another mile-stone on the road which we are passing by. Shall it be heedlessly and without a thought, or shall we stay and read the inscription which will tell us the direction in which we are travelling?

First, then, let us speak of the character of our society here.

A great French preacher tells us, in one of his most eloquent sermons, that every nation has a soul; and that it is on the soundness or unsoundness of that national soul that the true prosperity or degradation of a people depends.

This school of ours has its soul, its fixed character, its heritage of common thoughts, the traditions which it transmits, and which colour the sympathies and tastes of you who are here to-night, and of those who are hereafter to succeed you in this place.

What is the meed of talents of which the great Master thinks this place worthy? What is the nature

of the soil in which the great Husbandman is sowing His seed now, and will sow it hereafter?

I seem to see in the life of a community like ours the semblance of a river, gathering volume from the tributaries of many a mountain stream, till it loses itself in the great sea of life beyond. Are the waters which roll into that waste to be clear and sparkling, or to be foul and turbid?

It depends on you; yes, on you perhaps more than on any other generation which has passed away from these walls. From you is the full meed of talents required.

I seem to see in this community a bridge, as it were, connecting the quiet country and untainted atmosphere of childhood with the dust, and gloom, and din, and interminable rush of the great world-fair beyond; and one after another you cross this bridge, lingering perhaps before you pass away, and sometimes, I hope, grateful and thankful to that structure by which you are crossing to the other side. Are you mere passengers, or are you contributing anything to the solidity of the work which enables you to pass out into life successfully?

Nay, I seem to see in this community a fair temple consecrated to God's service which a man may venerate while still in his native land, but which, when as an emigrant he sails away from his home, lingers far more dearly than before in his memory; so that even when tossing on the desolate ocean or wandering

in pathless wilds, his thoughts turn back ever and anon to the pastures of his native land, and by the strength of faith he sees and enjoys again the solemn sabbaths of his early days.

Such images may serve to remind you of the position your school will hold to you in after life.

Can you not believe that such an institution has a soul, a fixed character, talents, more or less, committed to it by the great Giver of all things?

Does this school represent to you a corporate existence—a body greater than yourselves, having common interests and common sympathies, bound together by a high ideal of Christian life, by a community of sacred ordinances, by the common partaking of that Holy Feast which united so many of us to-day? Or do you regard it merely as a collection of individuals, bound together indeed by common work and common amusements, or perhaps stirred into a passing sense of unity by common festivity or by common sorrow, but with only such cohesion as belongs to a column of sand, supported by the transient whirlwind, but of which, when the blast is over, every atom falls asunder?

What, I ask, is the meaning to you of this fixed character, this soul, which belongs to you as a corporate body? What are the signs of it? Is it found in manliness—manliness in its highest and truest sense? Have you learnt here to appreciate the true

dignity of life, to honour work, to despise listless self-indulgence, to look for your companions in life hereafter, not among those who sneer at all that is honest and of good report, but among those who set God always before them, and strive for holy and Christian aims?

And if this be so, or if this be not so, God will require the future of this school, its traditions, its tastes, its beliefs, its knowledge, of this generation.

The great Master will say to you and to me, Where are the talents I gave you? Where is the fruit in return for the seed that I have sown?

And what answer shall we have to give?

Here is Thy talent, the soul of this place of Christian education, lying wrapt up in a napkin, untouched, unutilized. Lo, here is Thy seed, trodden underfoot, rootless, choked, and dead.

"Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee." A place dedicated to the service of God, and yet overlaid with the rust of sloth and self-indulgence and sin.

Or shall this be our answer when our Lord returneth?

"Thy five talents have gained five talents more." The seed which Thou hast sown in our soil has brought forth an hundredfold.

Well done, good and faithful servants!

Yes, if you once grasp the idea that this school possesses a character, the loss of which infinitely

outweighs all other gain; if you learn to live up to this character in your own school-days here, then you will leave behind you no mere set of obscure traditions, which gain credit simply because they are old, quite apart from their intrinsic merit, but you will bequeath to future generations a school history founded on principles of true nobility, and you will hand on the torch of good tradition undimmed, nay, rather, burning more and with intenser flame as from hand to hand it passes in the race.

It is only when you strive to cultivate this higher corporate life here that you will be true benefactors of this school; thus and thus only will it come to the attainment of the high and holy purpose which it was designed to fulfil—the training and education of Christian gentlemen.

I have said enough of the development of the society to which we all belong; and even if time allowed me, little remains to be said with regard to the individuals which compose it.

Often before from this place have I shown you how infinite for good or for evil is the influence of each on the lives of those around you; so that I am assured of this, that if you care little or nothing for the salvation of your own soul, if you never have any high aspiration, any noble motive in your own life, you will care still less for the soul or character of this institution of which you are an unworthy representative.

Not one among you, perhaps, has yet arrived at that period of life at which, to use the language of the parable, the great Master stamps you as worthy of great or of little trust in His good cause. It is for this period that you are all preparing here; it is your unformed character that you and those set over you are helping to develop. What infinite capacity for that development there may be in each of you, God only knows.

I have reminded you perhaps before of that Arabian story of the fairy tent which a young prince brought hidden in a walnut-shell to his father. "When it was placed in the palace, it grew till it overshadowed the king and his court. Taken into the courtyard, it filled the space till all the household stood beneath its shade. Brought into the midst of a great plain where the army was encamped, it spread its covering all abroad till it gave shelter to a host."

An allegory of the growth of the soul of man, which can expand into almost infinite nobility, or shrink into almost absolute nothingness, and be, like the talent hid in the napkin, utterly dead to all high and holy work.

It is one of the most beautiful treasures of the young that this capacity is far more open to them than to those who neglect the attainment of a higher life till later years.

And to the young Christian, I think the first

consciousness of contending against sin in his own heart or in the lives of his fellows is capable in its results of leading him far nearer to that heaven from whence he came, than if he flings away his opportunities now, and puts off the day of salvation till, as he thinks, a later time in his life's history.

If you confront sin *now*, if you hate it with perfect hatred, and fling yourself into the conflict *now* against your Master's enemies, then, like the knight of God in the legend, you will be able to say—

> "My strength is as the strength of ten
> Because my heart is pure."

But if you put off the encounter, your strength afterwards will be no better than a coward's, since your life will no longer be pure. Yes, if you do not face now the foes of your soul never again will you enter upon the conflict with equal ardour; never again in after years will you gain a complete and triumphant victory, such as crowns the early, youthful conqueror over self and sin.

"Unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath.

A few more words before I end. In three days there will have been gathered into the past a term, fruitful, as I fain would hope, to some at least of you in the results of labour and manful endeavour

after the light of knowledge, rich, in a still higher sense, in its effects on your moral and spiritual life.

There is something of sadness in these partings, even though they be for a little while, for they make us pause in the hurry of life, and look back to the past: past opportunities perhaps lost, past sins unrepented of, past sorrow unfruitful, past happiness never perhaps to return.

A year ago! What changes have passed over us since then! It is a saddening thought, these changes in our school history; changes in the faces I see before me this evening.

It is not the same congregation to which I preached on Sunday night a year ago, and never again on earth shall we meet quite the same as we do now.

A year ago! There is one face that I miss, one voice that is silent now, one bud of early promise cut off before its prime, one life which a year ago we all knew, and most of us learned to love. You remember how, one summer morning, God's finger touched him, and calmly, without a sigh, he slept the sleep that knows no waking—slept into eternity; and the voice that we loved to hear in this church has learnt a sweeter minstrelsy in the heavenly choir.

Thus of the past; what of the future?

To-day we are "standing on the ridge separating the valley of the old year from the valley of the new, and we strain forward, as it were, to see what will

befall us in the coming time; we ask what new friendships shall we make, what fortunes shall we encounter, what new sorrow or happiness shall crush or brighten us?"

And as we look forward to see, lo! the veil of mist closes in, and shuts out the future and the downward path.

Whether I who speak to you, or you who sit before me, will be alive in a year's time, what our fortunes will be, what our troubles, God alone can tell! But this we *do* know, that whether clouds or sunshine chequer the path of our pilgrimage, we need fear no evil if we take Christ for our Guide.

See! we are all of us voyagers on the ocean of life. What will be the fate of you, and you, and you, in the coming year? Some of us have had as yet naught but cloudless skies above, and the ripple of pleasure. Others of us are farther on, for we see the rocks of temptation, the dangerous reefs of doubt, the tempest of adversity and remorse. Who is your pilot? Is it Christ? Where is your destiny? Is it in the home beyond the foaming waters, or a death in the fury of the storm? Where is your soul drifting? Is it towards the haven of eternity, or towards the iron-bound shores of self-caused misery?

If to any of you I am speaking for the last time this Sunday evening, I pray you to bear this in mind, that our kneeling together at that Holy Table this

morning is the sacred pledge by which you and I have agreed together that we are working in a common cause, that we shall continue united in a common brotherhood, in common nobleness of life here and in common hopes of life hereafter.

So when parting, which is the lot of humanity, comes to us one by one, we may feel that we are still linked together in one holy cause, and are fighting in the same great battle-field of life side by side; and though death or circumstance may sever us here, we shall yet be united at the last in that heavenly land which shall be our common and eternal home.

## SERMON II.

### The Inner Life.

PREACHED AT BRADFIELD, FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT, 1882.

"*And He said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while.*"—MARK vi. 31.

AT the other end of the world there reigns a religion which numbers infinitely more adherents than the creed of Christianity has ever gained—a religion which to all human appearance suits the dreamy idealism of the Oriental mind far better than the more practical tenets of Christianity—a religion which teaches that the highest life is to rest on the pure intellectual contemplation of the Divine Being, and that to that end men must annihilate in themselves all human emotions, all family affections, all social ambitions, all loves.

Buddhism—the religion of loneliness, the religion of unsociability, the religion of mystery—appears vague and unmeaning to the minds of Western nations; it seems to us to cut, as indeed it does, at the root of all social life, and, if followed out

to its logical consequence, would end in the annihilation of the human race; each man and woman standing completely alone, as it were, before the face of God, and at the end of life gaining as their exceeding great reward the loss of all personality, all consciousness, and the absorption into the Eternal Mind from which they sprang.

Now, every religion which has gained any hold at all over the human mind must, as it seems to me, contain within itself the seeds of truth; otherwise, by an inexorable law of nature, it would, like everything else which has no intrinsic worth, infallibly have died out and perished long ago.

What then is this kernel of truth underlying the false religion of Buddha, which has appealed successfully to a vast mass of mankind, and which appeals in a certain sense to us as Christians? It consists, I think, in this, that it is a great attempt to satisfy one side of human longing—the longing of all noble souls to get nearer to God; and that, secondly, we can never get nearer to God so easily, so truly, so consciously, as when we are *alone*.

And though it may seem a strange thing to you to be told that the season of Lent, founded as it is on an historical episode in the life of the Man-God, Christ Jesus, has any similarity to or connection with the system of a false religion such as that of Buddha, yet it is absolutely true, and forms indeed one of the

strongest proofs of its divine origin, that Christianity from its very beginning seized on whatever there was of truth in the system of every other creed, and absorbed into itself the solitary grandeur and contemplative force of Buddhism, just as it absorbed into itself the philosophy of the Greek and the legal ordinances of the Roman, shaping them all to its own high ends.

It has been maintained indeed, and maintained with truth, that of all religions which have taken hold of men's minds, Christianity is the only one that has had much bearing on practical life; and that it is for this reason, humanly speaking, that it has been so potent a factor in the world's progress. Now this statement is no doubt absolutely and entirely true. It is because of its social character; it is because it addresses itself to men as members of a community; it is because it lays down rules for our guidance in dealing with our fellows; it is because nothing is unclean that comes into its net, Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free; it is because it adapts itself to all social organisms, whether republican or monarchical, whether democratic or socialistic, without for one moment losing its own individuality, but exercising its own mighty power outside of them all; it is because, in one word, it is practical, that, humanly speaking, it has come or is coming to be universal.

But when we insist so much on the fact that

Christianity is practical, we seem to say after all what is only half the truth. It not only supplies us with an incomparable guidance in our dealings with others, but it also satisfies that inward spiritual longing for solitary communion with God which is the birthright of all noble minds. And this, as I conceive, is its point of contact, its point of sympathy with Buddhism. Were Christianity exclusively external, practical, what would it be more than a code of ethical precepts entirely divorced from a spiritual creed? or else it would perhaps degenerate into a mere cluster of theological dogmas, which would even less affect the spiritual growth of our souls. But it is because it is an eternal record of a Person and Life, Whose steps we can trace, Whose life we can imitate, with Whom we can be alone, that it has laid hold in the highest sense of the spiritual nature of man, and revolutionized the world.

And so I would at the beginning of this Lenten season, the special season of self-examination, dwell more on the contemplative, introspective, Buddhistic phase of Christianity, less on the practical, external phase. To quote the words of a great thinker:—

"There is something utterly painful to some minds in loneliness; it represents to them all that is dreary, much that is awful and terrible. To the guilty, to the very guilty soul, to be alone is the worst of evils. To know that nothing stands between the soul and its

Creator; that the poor, perjured thing which you call yourself is being passed in review by the all-seeing eye of God, is being weighed in the balance and found wanting; that your name is written down in the black record-book that lies, as it were, on God's judgment throne,—is a thought so full of agony that you try to banish it and all such dark and gloomy thoughts from your mind for ever."

Sometimes you cannot do this. Sometimes, when a man is brought face to face with sudden death—death by drowning, or fire, or other accident—we are told that through some mysterious physical agency the whole history of his past life starts again into being, and passes as a huge picture in a moment of time across his brain; and this sudden awful resurrection of our past life, produced by the morbid, unusual conditions in which men find themselves, is not unlike what is sometimes felt, or partly felt, by the very guilty soul when it is alone. Then the spectres of our dead selves rise up and haunt us. Those secret undiscovered deeds which we fondly boast are hidden deep down, secure from every eye—*sub alta mente repostum*—see! they rise again with all the tinsel of their fascination rotted off them. All those ghastly oaths which we swore so long ago, all those impure imaginations which we fostered in our bosoms, all that cruel atmosphere of lies and cheating in which we lived, and which now seem to defile

our very breath, those deeds of foul villainy done skulkingly in secret corners and dark places of the earth, day after day, hour after hour,—see, what a horrid crew they form when marshalled together now to bear their silent witness against our guilty soul!

Oh, it is terrible for an unrepenting soul to fall into the hands of the living God; to be alone with the Father, Whose name we have outraged and despised; alone with the Christ, Whom we have scourged and crucified; with the Spirit, Whom we have gone nigh to quench and murder in our soul!

But even the comparatively innocent man may well feel a sense of fear, a sense of dread solemnity, when he opens again the closed volumes of the book of his life, and turns over leaf after leaf, and sees the blots of sin defiling its every page.

But not for this cause only does this sense of solemnity weigh on the soul of the lonely man. There is also dread, because we are far from human sympathy.

Human sympathy! human sympathy! Ah! it can do much; it can relieve the aching heart and soothe the troubled brow. We may tell our father or our mother much; we may take our burden of sin and sorrow to our sister or our friend, but generally we cannot, we dare not tell *all;* there is some secret burden we carry about with us, and shall carry about with us to our graves. No, we dare not tell that!

"Alas! is even love too weak
To unlock the heart and let it speak?"

Whether that burden be heavy or be light has depended, will depend, upon ourselves.

You remember, perhaps, the old Eastern legend—how the Old Man of the Sea, who at first seemed so light and gentle, a mere feather-weight to the shoulders of him who bore him, grows by degrees heavier, more ferocious, and more exacting, till at last he crushes the victim beneath his weight, or throttles him within the vice of encircling arms. Horrible nightmare! nay, rather, most profound allegory of the burden that sits on the backs of most of us!

"Post equitem sedet atra cura," says the Roman poet; that load which perches behind the horseman's back is the load of sin.

Victor Hugo, in one of his most popular works, describes the method of attack of one of those enormous octopi that haunt the caverns of the Channel Islands. He describes how the horrid creature, seemingly at first merely an inert gelatinous mass, throws out a long leather-like arm, covered with multitudinous suckers, and encircles his foe with fatal grasp; but that one is hardly strong enough to secure his struggling victim, and so one by one he throws out his other arms till the prey is at his mercy. And the writer tells us that there is one, and

only one way, to conquer the reptile; by a quick and sudden motion to cut the joint which unites each arm to the body, and which is only exposed and vulnerable at the very moment when it is darting it out to seize its prey.

This is no inept illustration of the attack of sin; suddenly does it pounce upon you, but not all at once does Satan send out all his power and crush all the goodness out of the soul, but gradually, and at unguarded moments, his grasp strengthens, till at the last, unless the sword of the Spirit cut him down, resistance is in vain, and Satan is the conqueror for time and for eternity.

This, thank God, cannot yet be so with any whom I address this evening. Here your lives are still young, still untarnished by the deeper stain of the great outside world; still under governors and teachers, and not yet thrown altogether on your own responsibilities to do or die, to choose the right or the wrong, to gather wheat or tares in the harvest-field of life.

It is a noble thought that when we are born we are coming fresh from the treasure-house of God; that we still hear faint notes of the music of the land from which we came; still bear upon our faces a trace of that light which bathes with its glory the city of the heavenly Jerusalem. But soon, too soon, we pass away into storms and disputes and troubles of

worldlier life. Soon, too soon, the faint memories of heaven "fade into the light of common day." Soon, too soon, innocence vanishes, and the inevitable cloud of life makes dim the heavenly light.

I want you this Lent to come, as it were, into a desert place and rest a while; to be alone with your God, and meditate on the meaning of your life, whence you are and whither you are going; to gaze, as does the Buddhist, in contemplation of your God; to resolve now, when the young life-blood throbs warmly in your veins, to shake off once for all the slough of idleness, the slough of impurity, the slough of deceitful lips and a lying tongue, the slough of cowardly oaths and vulgar impotence, the slough of all that is base and mean and ignoble; to turn to Jesus, Who now, with outstretched arms, is ready to welcome you to Himself, and Who, though your sins be scarlet, shall make them white as snow, though they be like crimson, shall make them as wool.

The soul that has never looked eternity in the face has been called a vulgar soul. Look into it now; gaze into its depths. For you, my young brothers, for you a few short years may roll, and you, some of you to whom I am talking now, may be with those who sleep within the tomb. The shadow that waits for all men may be waiting for you even now. The reaper, whose name is Death, puts in his sickle, and often takes the fair young life away. Will it then be well

with thee in the unknown future? in the boundless eternity will it be well? Oh! if you turn to Christ, it will be well, very well; and if you come to Him, He will in no wise cast out. Over the hills and rough places of this world He shall carry you full lovingly in His everlasting arms, that faint not nor are weary, and take you at the last to that far country whence you came, to the eternal mansions of peace and love.

And if to some here the voice of warning has hitherto fallen on heedless ears; if they still are pandering to sensual appetites, wallowing in the styes of their own contrivance; if there be any here from whose lips the oath falls more easily than the word of prayer; if selfishness, indolence, lying, are crushing Christ out of their heart, I call to such as these, in the warning words of the prophet, this Lenten time, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

"Why will ye die? I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God."

"Behold, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation."

"The night cometh, when no man can work."

## SERMON III.

### Modern Laodiceans.

PREACHED AT BRADFIELD, NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, 1882.

"*I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth.*"—REV. iii. 15, 16.

THE vehement and scathing character of these words is, we must suppose, warranted by the character of the Church of Laodicea to which they were addressed.

And I think that on reflection we shall find that it is a type of character which has been not unknown at any period of the world's history, and that the present day may furnish us with examples in no way dissimilar to those Laodiceans, who prompted this bitter castigation in the days of the early Church.

I refer to a class of men, and boys too, who aim at nothing—and hit it—who spend their lives in moral and spiritual vegetation, impressed with no sense of responsibility for their action or inaction, not even inflated with a sense of their own importance, but

dull, passionless, inane; spurred to no single noble act even by the thought of general acclamation; thrilled with no generous sympathy for the interests or sufferings of their fellows; with no pulse beating responsive to class or sectarian insurgence, or to the wider range of patriotism and national ambition; but sapless, soulless, bloodless denizens of God's throbbing universe. The Spirit in the Revelation describes such people as lukewarm, and denounces them with imagery of withering indignation: "I will spue thee out of My mouth."

And the Bible has not been alone in condemning them. Writers of every age and nation have exhausted metaphor and illustration to point the finger of scorn at them. They are as straw drifting along the stream; feathers which float down the gale; waves which seem to the casual observer to move onward, but which a truer philosophy tells us merely move fancifully up and down in the same spot; they do not march onward, but "beat time, until time has beaten them," and laid them in a nameless grave; they are as "statues in some public square or garden, which art has so fashioned into a perennial fountain that through the lips or through the hands the clear water of life runs in a perpetual stream, and the marble stands there passive and cold, making no effort to arrest the gliding water." And Dante, in his description of damned spirits, reserves the outermost circle of

hell for those who have thus toyed and flirted with the awful realities of life.

> "Who nor rebellious proved,
> Nor yet were true to God, but for themselves
> Were only. From his bounds Heaven drove them forth
> Not to impair his lustre, nor the depth
> Of hell receives them, lest the accursèd tribe
> Should glory thence with exultation vain."

Now, I say that this is a type of character which in this age is common, and I venture to think becoming commoner every day; the character of those who live as if they had no souls to be saved, as if they had no past or hereafter even in this world, as if the folding of their hands to sleep were their natural occupation, and the end and sum of their existence—an existence which God gave them and Christ redeemed.

No one who looks out into what is called the world of society can deny that this is so; that there is a class of men whom he can instinctively set down as exactly resembling the Laodiceans—a lotos-eating class who call earnestness vulgarity, and work degradation, and who, if they have any aim at all, aim at taking the slightest possible interest in any current event or burning question of the day, as the surest passport to the reputation of being men of breeding and good taste.

Now, when I say that such a type of character—this indifferentism—is in my opinion infinitely more dangerous to the security of our country and to the

interests of real religion than the insurgence of the masses or the attacks of atheism, my statement might be met with surprise. But that it is so I have not the faintest doubt.

Let me take an instance of what I mean, which may be familiar to some of you. There is a class of persons lately brought into undeserved notice which, to bring the case home to ourselves, is particularly observable in the universities of to-day, and must therefore, I fear, largely draw its recruits from our public schools. You know the type of young men, if not from actual observation, at least from papers and periodicals. The craning neck, the limp, weak-kneed form, the languid attitude, and the soft minor tones, betray too well the devotee of bastard art. Whether this type of human being be the product of a decaying civilization dying of atrophy, or an excrescence on the plethoric constitution of a generally hardworking nation, I know not, and I leave others to decide.

But I want to call your attention to it as a danger affecting ourselves, since we are one of those institutions from which similar imbecilities may spring. For remember that the same principle of effeminacy and soullessness and affected indifference may be among us, even though it may not burst out into such grotesque shapes and antics. And if any of you think that I am travelling somewhat beyond the limits of my ordinary sermons to you, in introducing a subject

which at first sight seems scarcely to bear on Christian doctrine, I would ask you to remember who it was who taught us to count nothing common or unclean; that is, from all sources, wheresoever danger threatens, whencesoever good may come, to bring material which may help to strengthen the kingdom of Christ in the hearts of men, to cast out the principle of evil, in whatever gloomy corner lurking, and to see Christianity in everything.

Lukewarmness, languor, æstheticism (falsely so called), indifference to the things of God,—these are the vices which my text condemns to-night; and my teaching is that of the immortal preacher, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" —*earnestness.*

To take first the lower motives to sustained and noble action. Who is it that calls forth the plaudits of an admiring world? With whose name do the annals of his country most often ring? Whose titles does posterity emblazon on her scroll of fame? Is it not the man who is in earnest?

At whose feet does the laurel of success almost invariably fall? Of the man in earnest; the man who sets his teeth in spite of opposition, of abuse, and misunderstanding, who faces and fights his difficulties, and kills them with an iron will.

> "Oh, well for him whose will is strong!
> He suffers, but he will not suffer long;
> He suffers, but he cannot suffer wrong."

Leonidas, with his four hundred heroes against the myriads of the Persian host, fell; but succeeded in showing his country that the foes whom they had so much dreaded should rather be despised.

Horatius, singly fronting the onset of ten thousand foes till the bridge was down and Rome was saved, was in earnest.

Peter the Great, toiling in the foreign workshop, learning with unwearied persistence that he might rescue his whole people from the slough of ignorance, was in earnest.

Garibaldi, leading seemingly a forlorn hope to create a united Italy, was in earnest.

But you may say that there are countless masses who are in earnest, and yet are in earnest about things which are in direct conflict with the highest interests of religion and of Christ: the miser, the men with the commercial soul, yes, even the profligate, so far as he is a consistent profligate, are all in earnest about the objects of their life.

And this is, of course, true; and we can put our finger on that element of life from which this earnestness has grown, and say, "Thus and so far is it good, as it is an application, though a distorted application, of a noble power."

So far also is the old philosopher's paradox true, that the man who sins, not knowing that he is sinning, is more difficult to reform than the conscious

sinner, and that in men who are the greatest sinners is often found the capacity for becoming the greatest saints, while of those who, in the language of the text, are neither hot nor cold, there is perhaps more reason to despair, since in them we can discover no large traces of capacity in either direction.

But earnestness of soul, earnestness after things which last when the fashion of this life and this world pass away,—this is the true earnestness which I call upon you to-night, as often before, to understand and embrace.

Earnestness of life! Do not think that any single word of yours is too insignificant, any sphere of action too lowly, to swell that list of deeds which is recorded somewhere in the books of God.

> "Pitch thy behaviour low, thy projects high,
> So shalt thou humble and magnanimous be;
> Sink not in spirit: who aimeth at the sky
> Shoots higher much than he who means a tree."

As often before, so now I call you to remember that no action of yours, however trivial, however small the society may be, but has an awful influence on the destinies of yourself, on the destinies of others, and on the destinies of the race.

I was asked once to describe what I thought was the actual way by which we arrived at general truths from particular instances, and I pictured the process as that of a man picking up the particular facts one

by one as they lay on the ground, and carrying them up a ladder into the storehouse, then descending again to pick up more, while every time the general truths in the storehouse at the top increased in bulk and force. And so it is of our habits. Every action lies as it were on the ground; you can carry it heavenward and lay it there, and come down to carry up more, till all your treasury is in heaven.

But this is not all. If it were, religion would be a selfish aim. The imagery extends further. You can pick up the actions of others and carry them up too; you can ever in your humble sphere of daily intercourse lift up their loads of earthly aims and carry them heavenwards, by kindly words, by unsullied motives, by earnest deeds, making others earnest and unsullied too.

This is the true Christian—he who sees Christianity in everything.

And I knew one, now gone to his full treasury in heaven, whose lifelong object, in spite of failings which others saw and exaggerated, was thus to spiritualize all the earthly aims and interests of men, whether social or intellectual, and to lift them and carry them up to heaven; so that Arthur Stanley, Dean of Westminster, has left his undying mark on the history of religious life.

And though our sphere be not so broad or high as his, yet we can be earnest too.

There is an old statue in the museum at Cairo which gave me a more striking idea of earnestness than anything I can remember. It is that of Horus, the bright sun-god. He stands in the prime of youth, with hands straight down by his side, fists clenched, and one foot advanced, smiling into and fronting the world.

Is not this a type of what our life should be, except that ever and anon we should lift our head heavenward, not like star-gazers, who, as they gaze, fall into a pit, but looking for help from that source from which alone it can come?

And this is just what Jesus did. With Him *laborare est orare.* From the time He was found in the temple, and said, "I must be about My Father's business," to the last dread hour in Gethsemane, when He called to His disciples, "Rise, let us be going," His lifelong motto was *earnestness.* Earnestness, not to obtain individual ends, or merely to improve the society in which He lived, but to save, enlighten, and revivify a world.

I would in conclusion tell you an allegory.

A dark church, with windows few and low, which the sun can only catch and penetrate at early morn and at eventide, when with slanting beams he throws the broken, dappled shadows of the painted windows on to the opposite wall. But there are no windows in the roof, so that the sun, when high in heaven,

cannot break through with his mid-day rays, but the church remains dark and cheerless and cold.

It is an allegory of the lives of most of us. In childhood we catch some broken light of the divine, but when the work-a-day religion tries to penetrate, we have no high windows to our souls, and we gain nothing but reflected light; at eventide, again, some broken flicker pierces through the aperture, and then all is gloom. May not this be an allegory of any here!

"'Tis the time for action," says the old poet; and the preacher replies, "The night cometh, when no man can work."

The time for earnestness, for goodness, is *now*. To-morrow! to-morrow!—we know it not; it is a figment of the brain.

Grasp goodness, and it will not sting; thrust forth a languid palm, and you must fain draw back.

Be earnest, and the society in which you move may first laugh at you, but it will afterwards follow you.

The larger schools are accused of moving too much in a single groove, so that when they get traditions of evil no efforts can remove them. But, thank God, with us this is not so. I know—*you* know better than I do—that evil can be uprooted and cast out so that no trace remains. It has been—it is in the power of some individuals among you to crush it so that never again it may uprear its head.

Keep firm your purpose still, and you will be the true sons of the school in which you have passed these days of your boyhood, and (may I call you) the true children in Christ of those to whom have been entrusted the responsibility and charge of human souls.

## SERMON IV.

### A Little City.

PREACHED AT BRADFIELD, SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY, 1883.

"*There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength.*"—ECCLES. ix. 14–16.

THERE is a danger, I think, to which the most devout students of the Bible are especially likely to fall a prey, and it is this: an overhastiness to suppose that the events described in the Old Testament happened as they did, not so much as matters of history complete in themselves, but that they were planned and foreordained by God principally to enforce some spiritual or moral lesson for the sake of those who were to live in the world after the coming of Christ, and that their historical significance is only secondary.

This error is most especially noticeable where some events of ante-Christian history are, by an indiscriminate and illogical play of fancy, thought to

typify some occurrence in the life or times of Christ; when, in fact, nothing but a misguided enthusiasm, eager to detect similarities rather than differences, would have dreamt of perceiving any parallel or resemblance at all.

Such, for instance, are the twelve wells and seventy palm trees found at Elim by the Israelites in their wanderings in the wilderness, which are supposed by some good men to prefigure the twelve apostles and seventy disciples appointed by our Lord. Such is the misdirected energy which contrives to see in the trappings and minute details of the Mosaic ritual, ordinances which should be binding on the ceremonials of all times, and on the consciences of Christian men of to-day.

On this error, the result of indiscreet enthusiasm overbalancing the logical faculties, I will not enlarge; I only point to it by way of contrast, to show that, on the other hand, there are some few passages in the Old Testament describing events whose interest is first moral or spiritual, and only secondarily, if at all, historical—passages which, beyond all dispute, are intended by their writers in the first instance not to be statements of history, but, though clothed with the external form of fact, to be pictures, epigrams, or allegories, suggestive of some high moral or spiritual truth.

Now, the text before us is, I think, of this kind.

The incident which it describes is probably not matter of history, but a play of the writer's fancy, expressing not what *occurred*, but rather what *might* occur.

Its principal object, thrown as it is somewhat abruptly into the midst of a series of reflections on human life, is to bring out the ways of the world into sharp contrast with what the world should be. It describes to us to-day, as clearly as when first written, sad facts of human experience, while it suggests teachings to guide our daily life.

In the rich setting of this dramatic narrative, there shine, as it were, four gems of thought.

They are these: Danger, Deliverance, Ingratitude, the Voice of Truth.

Let us take them in order.

DANGER. "There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it."

Do I speak in parables? A little city—a society, that is, where every one has an appreciable influence, whether he likes it or not, and is a potent factor in the life of the whole; where the individual is not an insignificant item lost in the mass, but powerful for good or for ill on his fellow-men; where we cannot talk of average respectability or ordinary behaviour, but where the cowardice and treachery of the bad, or the nobility and bravery of the good, carry with them the subversion or salvation of the community.

Ay, that is how you and I stand before God this day. The soul of this society, the souls of our brothers here, are in our hand, and God will require it at our hand, and God will set on us the mark of Cain, if we do anything, by act, or thought, or word, to murder our brother's soul.

What in her best days made Athens—a little city—great. What made the fire of patriotism kindle the hearts of her citizens? Was it not the sense of this—the sense of individual responsibility, the knowledge that on each one, on *his* bravery, on *his* self-sacrifice, on *his* efforts, depended the welfare, nay, the very existence of the State—that stirred each man to be a hero? And patriotism in its highest, purest, most Christian meaning, is it not our duty, nay, the very reason for our existence here?—the patriotism which fears not to put down evil and to stamp out every word and deed that defileth—the oath which stains the lips and defiles the heart of Christian gentlemen, and the dirty or dishonourable actions that poison the life-blood of a public school.

Do I see before me to-night any one who, this term, by wrong like this, by evil speaking, by evil thoughts, by evil deeds, is serving under the banner of the great king of evil, building up great bulwarks to our State's ruin.

Is there among those sitting here to-night one who, by idleness, by the indifference or the barrenness of his

life here, is a traitor to our State? Mark him; for hardly less than the more open evildoer, by his example, by his influence, he too is a murderer, he too has on him the curse of Cain; and if he cries, as all cowards do, "Am I my brother's keeper?" I answer to him, At your hands, because you make no effort, because you care not for others, because you fold your hands and allow the king of evil to enter unopposed into the city which should belong to God,—at your hands, therefore, shall God require your brother's soul.

DELIVERANCE. "Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city."

Notice the epithet. He was poor—fatal crime! I do not suppose that the poor man commanded much more respect in those days than he does in these commercial ones of ours. But he was a person whose value was discovered when trouble came.

If I were to say that ideas, not facts, are what really rule the world, my meaning would perhaps not be so clear as I could wish. I will say, therefore, notice that wisdom, not force, is the real help out of difficulties.

"By his wisdom he delivered the city."

And what sort of wisdom will deliver our State? Intellectual wisdom is well enough; it wins scholarships; it is a force in our small society, as it is right it should be, by bringing its possessor into the front rank; it wins, as men say, success in life. But it is

not the wisdom that is meant here; it is not the allegorical wisdom of the text.

By "wisdom" is meant a higher thing, a knowledge of the things within and without us, a knowledge practical, to be used every day among your fellows; the knowledge of the law—which cannot be broken, however many others you break—that sin brings as its inevitable consequence weakness and suffering, that goodness brings no less surely victory and strength. This is the true wisdom. To know this all your life is to have found out the secret meaning of life; to act on this is to save your soul, and not only your own soul; not merely to defeat the king of evil when he fights against you personally, but to save the city; to preserve without stain that common life here which alone makes this school or any school worth preserving; sustaining in yourself and others the spirit of honour, the spirit of purity, the spirit of love, holy and undefiled; fighting in a common cause of brotherhood against the sin which is ever seeking to find an entrance here.

You may say, "I am an insignificant member of this school; I have no influence; others would laugh at me if I set up for a pattern, and showed the horror which I really feel for what I see and hear among some who are older than myself."

Take comfort; it was the poor insignificant man who delivered the city.

No single act, however humble, no single word, however weak, but does its work. It seems to pass away with the breath, to fade and be forgotten, but its effect remains, yes, for ever, whether for weal or woe, in the hearts of those who hear it, and passes on as a heritage to those who follow after, when your very face is forgotten, and when, perhaps, your voice is silent for ever.

And so I pass on to touch very briefly on the two last subjects.

INGRATITUDE. "Yet no man remembered that same poor man."

Ingratitude! Alas! it is the way of the world. The poor man dies down and is forgotten when the world does not want him any more.

What a thought for a moralist! says one. What an opportunity for a sermon by a demagogue! says another. What grand, consoling truth! says the Christian, when he recognizes that ingratitude merely implies the superiority of the benefactor over those whom he has benefited. "The world never knows its greatest men." Is this not true of the greatest of benefactors, Christ Himself?

Look at Peter with his threefold denial.

And when He hung on the accursed tree, I wonder where were the sick, and the halt, and the maimed, and the blind whom He had made whole. Did they join in the wild cry, "Crucify Him! crucify Him!"

which condemned the great Physician? Was no voice of all the multitude raised to save Him, Who spake as never man spake to save their souls?

And if ingratitude was the only recompense for the blessings Christ bestowed, there is no wonder if the insignificant, the poor, the humble, who work for God, find no gratitude now.

It is the blow that stabs more deeply than any other. You remember how one of Shakespeare's greatest creations, Julius Cæsar, struggled not against the assassin's blow, after he saw Brutus' arm lifted to strike.

> "Ingratitude more strong than traitor's arm
> Quite vanquished him: then burst his mighty heart."

And though, if there be a crime of deeper dye than all the guilty train of human vices, it is ingratitude, yet it is the one vice of which the world at large takes least account.

If, then, you find that all your influence—little as it may be—for good is spurned, laughed down, or thrust aside, do not despair, remembering that every protest of yours, every brave outstanding against evil, open or disguised, will, though it appear not at the time, have power to save the souls of those among whom you live.

Lastly, THE VOICE OF TRUTH. "Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength."

*Then*—not *yet*, but *then*. "Then said I." Yes, the

ingratitude of man is the test of the approving voice of God. And, as I muse on this, I seem to see the glorious thought which underlies it.

If good deeds were recompensed in this world by corresponding material advantages, there would be no field for that expansion of all that is highest and noblest in human character, there would be no scope for the development of the God within us, which, if I read the meaning of Christ's teaching aright, is the grand central truth of Christian life.

Horatius, fighting against a myriad of foes on the bridge, gets as his reward a few acres of Roman land, and we unconsciously feel that his heroism is somehow dwarfed by it. But *work without recompense*, that is a great man's true reward. Yes, Christ never held out, if I read His Word aright, reward for work done —so much wages for so much labour. To James and John, who asked that they should sit one on His right hand and the other on His left in His kingdom, He replied, "Ye shall indeed drink of the cup (of suffering) that I drink of."

Yes, the heroism of a man or boy of heroic soul is its own most sufficient reward. Say not to yourselves, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

Not the universal plaudits of the multitude, nor the scoffs and sneers of the worldly, mean anything to him whose soul rests on high and holy thoughts.

And it was of such as these that the preacher was thinking when he talked of wisdom—that precious gift which, unlike all else we seek in earth, is never sought in vain; the wisdom of a high and spotless soul, which purifies all it touches, making others like itself; which crushes out the baneful passions of the heart, and the impulses of fierce desires, but keeps alive the pure fire of affection, and teaches by its own fair example how to find good in everything, seeing the silver lining in every cloud, and in every thought and word and action breathing out the Spirit of Christ among the lives of men.

This is the true wisdom. Seek it now, for it must be sought in your boyhood's days; and keep it before you as the lodestar of your life; and insignificant though you be, you will by your wisdom save not only yourself, but many another who follows in your steps here, from the deadliest foe who encompasses human life—the king of evil; and though the fame of your individual efforts for the cause of good in this school may seem soon to have been forgotten or remain unrecognized, your work will endure for ever in the memory of God.

## SERMON V.

### The Dualism of Christ.

PREACHED AT BRADFIELD, THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT, 1883.

"*And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy Name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us.*"—LUKE ix. 49, 50.

"*He that gathereth not with Me scattereth.*"—LUKE xi. 23.

ONE of the most striking characteristics of our Lord's teaching is to be found, I think, in the dualism which runs through the whole.

Everywhere we come across traces of what appears at first sight an antagonism of statement.

Compare the saying, "Many are called but few are chosen," with "In My Father's house are many mansions." Contrast the text, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," with "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

Now, first, let us remark that the teaching of Christ is by no means a solitary instance of apparently inconsistent doctrines.

It is a fact that in all great teachers, ancient and modern, expressions of thought and doctrine, on a superficial view, contradict each other. Socrates, Bacon, and other exponents of moral teaching, have all contributed thoughts to the world which at first sight appear irreconcileable with what we read of them elsewhere, and their reconciliation has only been effected by the more thoughtful and appreciative of their disciples. And if this be so of the works of men of genius, it is perhaps less to be wondered at if we find in the words of the Son of God enigmas, which only give up their solution to the patient and reverential student of His words.

We are, as it were, in a dark room, with flint and steel in either hand—things opposite in nature, and by themselves dull and lustreless; it is only when we bring them together that we discover the latent fire which gives illumination to our minds.

Now let us apply this principle to the texts before us; let us try this evening to strike out from this seeming opposition of thought a spark of truth. And this end may perhaps be best gained by observing the circumstances under which each statement was made.

In the former Christ is brought into contact with some teacher who professes to do the same works as Himself. Here is a man who professes to cast out devils. Now observe a very remarkable thing. There

is, I suppose, nothing which those who aspire to special power of any kind feel more hard to put up with, than to find some one else trenching on their particular province, utilizing and making capital out of their ideas or capacities, or the results of their labours. It requires a more exalted mind than people who have never been in such circumstances generally suppose, to resist the temptation to feel a lurking bitterness, a secret animosity, against those who are working as rivals or as candidates for power, or popular applause, or material advantages, in the same line as ourselves. It is a striking evidence of the divinity of Christ that no such thought as this crosses His mind. On the contrary, He welcomes the new doctor of the soul, in words indelibly and eternally written for our learning. He teaches us the gospel of tolerance.

And I think adown the ages the voice of Christ comes to us this evening as He uttered the words nineteen centuries ago. You are indeed working in the cause of right, in the cause of God; but see another working near you, attended by a different band of followers, nay, even attracting your own followers to his side. Forbid him not; forbid him not. It is the same banner that floats over his efforts, it is the same haven to which he directs his vessel, for the same cause he waves his followers on.

If men and boys could only learn this lesson by

heart—this great evangel of tolerance, the nobility of soul which tries to see good in things which it may not quite understand, the true humility of mind which is not continually on the rack because of some fancied insult to its own dignity, which is not aggrieved because others do not think so much of us, or defer to, or consult us so much as we think usual or right—there would be less misery, less self-torture, less sin in the world; aye, for it is sin, deadly, grievous sin, to do what Christ tells us not to do—to nourish a bitter, angry, revengeful heart because we have been passed over or ignored.

Oh! woe to any minister of the gospel who does not himself breathe and preach Christ's gospel here—if any here there be who turn away, as last Sunday I bade you mark how Namaan did—turn away in a rage from God, because of some fancied insult from their fellow-men.

Bend low your head this night, and open the muttering lips, and ask forgiveness at the throne of Christ, and think not to say within yourselves, "I have been wronged; I have been despised; how shall I forgive?" It is the dark shadow of evil passing across your soul; your very anger and bitterness is the measure of the wrongness of your heart and life, for no man whose life is just, and heart is right, ever lets the sun go down upon his wrath.

"He that gathereth not with Me scattereth." The

occasion of this saying of Christ, seemingly so inconsistent with the other, will form a key to His meaning.

Is it no more than a mere coincidence that Christ was at that time engaged in the same work (the casting out of devils) as when He uttered the words, "He that is not against us is for us"?

But notice the real essential difference between the two. In the former He is giving direct encouragement to the work of God carried on by another teacher. Here He is condemning the blasphemy of those who are imputing His good deeds to the lowest motives. The accusation was, "He casteth out devils through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils." In the one He is praising work done; in the other He is condemning blasphemous and idle imputations. In the one He welcomes a fellow-worker in the cause of God; in the other He declares that those who help not that work, but who try to hinder it by attacking the character and actions of the worker, are fighting against God.

"He that gathereth not with Me scattereth." It is the great protest against dissension. "A kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation." He is preaching the great gospel of *unity*, as in the other passage He preaches the great gospel of *tolerance*.

And as the unquarried stone is to the casual traveller's eye dull and lustreless and full of rugosities, but when polished by the tool of the lapidary reveals the veins of marble which make it

fit to illuminate a palace; so, on a more minute study of God's Word, do the precious stones of Christ's teaching emit a radiance hidden from the sight of him that passeth by, and make a fair show in the palace of truth.

Yes, toleration and unity! He who has mastered these lessons aright has discovered the secret of earthly and eternal happiness, for he alone knows how to live who knows how to let live.

Look at the martyrdoms from the first century to the eighteenth, which has stained the fair name of Christianity with atrocities from which humanity recoils. And when we ask what deeds so infamous, what crimes so awful had been wrought, as to demand the penalties of an Inquisition, and the tortures of the rack, the only answer is, "Because he followeth not with us."

Look at the political animosities and social bitterness which inflame class against class in every country of Europe, and which, near our own shores, is the parent of murder and famine and ruin, throwing back civilization a thousand years. Is it not the same spirit of intolerance growing, like the fabled giant, silently through generations, till it stalks through the earth with head that strikes the heaven?

And look nearer home, deep down in your own hearts: quarrel breeding venom, venom developing into animosity, which has power to disintegrate the

society in which you live, and which becomes more embittered in proportion as the cause is more trivial and absurd.

I am not careful to weigh my words in this matter.

Ask yourselves this, Am I, or am I not a Christian? And I ask, Do you, or do you not think that your particular case, whatever it may be, differs from all the rest, and that you alone have cause for a rancorous and venomous heart?

> "Senseless and deformed
> Convulsive anger storms at large; or pale
> And silent settles into full revenge."

"He that gathereth not with Me scattereth."

As Christ will one day require your souls of me, so He requires now of you not only the spirit of passive toleration, but of active unity.

The calumniator who looked on and said Christ did the devil's work, looked on and did nothing, but only talked.

And Christ says to you to-night, in words that may convey a meaning, "He that gathereth not with Me scattereth." If you are not doing Christ's work, you are hindering it. Of that be sure. If in this place you are fighting the cause of misrule against the cause of order, the cause of wrong against the cause of right, you are not only doing incalculable mischief to your school, but you are injuring yourself most fatally in this world and the next.

## SERMON VI.

### The Science of Living.

PREACHED AT BRADFIELD, FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT, 1883.

"*Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.*"—ECCLES. i. 2.

"*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.*"—ECCLES. ix. 10.

THESE texts are not Christian sentiments. Indeed, the book in which they are found has no very close points of contact with the teaching of the New Testament. The author of Ecclesiastes often, indeed, arrives at truths which have the kernel of those uttered by the lips of Christ; but the expressions of the one are those of a sated voluptuary, tired of the follies of the world, the teaching of the other is that of a sinless Being, to Whom these follies are abhorrent and unfamiliar.

It is characteristic, however, of an enlightened Christianity that it can seize hold of whatever truth there is in foreign and even antagonistic systems, and make it her own; that she can fasten on all conclusions of human experience, and assimilate their

essence; that she can for us, as for the apostle of old, let down her net and draw earthly things to heaven, calling nothing common or unclean.

Let us to-night see how we can Christianize the texts before us.

No one who reads the Book of Ecclesiastes can fail to see that the key-note of the whole is the unsatisfying character of human aims.

Solomon was a man whom, after the fashion of the day, we should probably call eminently successful. There had been few vicissitudes in his career. His younger days had not been spent, as in David's case, in a constant struggle for existence against a relentless foe; on the contrary, an uncheckered, prosperous career was assured him from the cradle upward; the crown had been reserved for him by direct promise from Heaven. He had full assurance from the same Divine Source of unparalleled power, magnificence, and wisdom, and his expectations were fully realized.

We have to look, therefore, not to external circumstances, but to internal character, to discover the reason which leads him to brand human life as "vanity of vanities."

And it is just because we cannot deny that external circumstances do have a vast influence on the happiness of him who experiences them, that it becomes the more remarkable to find this man of vast power and realized opportunities reflecting in his old age on the

existence which has drifted by as made up of bitter shams and vain endeavours. Yes, it is a darkness of soul that comes on the man in the evening of life. He has been a sinner; the black spell of sin, of which we read elsewhere, "raises the accusing spectre of hours gone by, making stern Memory tell her tale against him;" he has quarrelled with the world; he has left the world because the delights of the world have left him; he has done with the sins which have not done with him; the memory of the sin remains while the appetite to enjoy has fled for ever; and so he charges human life in general as being the cause of his own disquietude.

And here we are, you and I, in the world. Are there any spectres in *our* past life over which we would fain draw tight the curtain even from our own souls? Does the cheek of any one here blush—if blush be left—or blanch at the thought of unforgotten and unforgiven sin, while ever and anon an unseen hand draws the curtain aside, and the awful thing stands gaunt and grim against the landscape of our lives—the spectre of evil deeds conceived or done against ourselves and others, of desecration of holy things, of blasphemy, of lying, of foul-speaking, of lust? Have you, like Solomon, even now a guilty soul? In vain your averted eye screens you from that image which haunts you and finds you out; "you are conscious of a gaze you cannot bear; the very leaves rustling near

you seem to tell your secret to the silent air, and the heavens are watching you with a thousand eyes." That is sin and guilt.

And if this be so with any of you here, the Book of Ecclesiastes, which of all the books of the Bible is printed, as it were, with a black border, will tell its own story to you, when manhood and age creep on, but repentance comes not; when a weariness of all things takes the place of lust and sin, but repentance comes not; when God is still far and when delight in sin vanishes, but repentance comes not; and death is at the door and the grave is yawning for you, but repentance comes not. Yes, then it has a voice for you. "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

But if there is this sad and mocking strain running through the book—if Solomon tells us throughout of the vanity of human effort, of the unsatisfying character of human life—he who thinks at all can scarcely fail to be considerably astonished to find him advocating, almost in the same breath, a teaching of fresh and vigorous action.

It is a golden thread running through the woof of the sad funeral garb. It is as if we had been confined in the mist of some damp and gloomy dungeon, and all at once brought out to drink deep draughts of the morning air. It is a philosophy of despair disappearing before the gospel of earnestness. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

But, indeed, the inconsistency is not so strange when we look deeper, and are confronted by the facts of the world around us. Everywhere, even in the world of nature, do we see decay and progress, despair and energy, walking, as it were, hand in hand.

Every tree which in springtime you see putting forth bud and flower is fructified by its own decaying leaves and branches.

No pauper—nay, no criminal fettered for life to the prison wall, with seemingly no hope in this world—but has his plans, his projects, his ambitions. We are so constituted by God that "hope springs eternal from the human breast."

What, then, do I gather from this verse of Solomon? I gather this: that happiness—yes, our eternal as well as temporal happiness—depends on having an aim, no matter what; an aim well defined in life.

I said at the beginning that this expression was not exclusively Christian. Far from it. The history of mankind no less than the course of nature teaches the necessity of an aim in life.

Atalanta, stopping to pick up the apple in the race, contains an allegory, a parable for us. It is the deflection of aim which loses us success in the race of life.

The life of every great man is the story of an inflexible aim carried out to the end. Alexander, Cæsar, Luther, Cromwell, all in their several ways set before

them some goal, and with indomitable will bore down opposition till the cause was won.

For remember this: it is not the man with the greatest intellect or the most splendid imagination that comes to the front in the race of life; but the man of determined purpose, of firm resolve, who sets before him a thing to be done, be it great or small, high or low, and does it—who most truly can be said to spend a successful life.

Some among you have heard of that system of philosophy which denies or doubts the existence of an external world, and asserts that all we know or can know of that world are the sensations, which in its various phases it produces in our individual selves. I say nothing of the truth or falsehood of such a theory when considered in itself, but in connection with our subject this evening, it contains, practically at any rate, a germ of truth; for the world, as we find it, is the world as we make it by our thoughts and words and actions in our individual lives. Determine to be noble and to see noble things, and you will see them; determine to be great and to see great things, and you will see them; set before you thus early in your life something to do, and determine to do it, come what will, and the world for you will be transformed into that.

Jungles and briers and forest trees opposed the progress of the pioneers of civilization in the new

world; but on they pressed, and behold! now they rule a vast continent.

But the weak, the vacillating, the purposeless, are like the hero of the Roman poet, who rushed about wildly cutting ghostly shadows with his sword; or like the traveller floundering after false fires as they beckon him onwards into the ever-deepening morass.

Ask yourselves to-night, What is my aim in life? What am I going to be? Not what profession are you going to adopt, though you ought to think of that early; but what are you going to *be* in a truer sense? What is your aim? What goal have you before you, or have you none? Is your life to be sublime, or is it to be contemptible? Is it to be that of a hero, or as that of the beasts that perish? Is it to be one of reason and light, or of sensuality and darkness? Can you answer me as Jesus answered His parents, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?"

Some of you are leaving school this term; I shall have no opportunity, perhaps, again to address you.

In the phraseology of the world, you "drop out of sight;" but do you drop out of mind? Nay! whatever you have done or left undone here will live—live, not only in God's Book on high, but in God's or the devil's work on earth. A vacant place!—there is no such thing. The place you have here will remain, though you vanish, from generation to generation, in

the acts, in the hearts, in the mouths, of those who follow you.

It is an awful thought to know that we cannot die, and that, though this bodily presence decays and moulders in the grave, our works do not follow us there, but live and live through all ages in the actions of posterity.

And thus does the past merge into the future; thus is time linked with eternity.

"Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face"—all that we have been, all that we are, all that we shall be; *then*, when the voice shall cry to us, "What hast thou done? Where is the talent?"

Yes, as one that on a mountain-top sees nothing a while for the thick clouds that encompass him, but soon the mists lift and the whole landscape below blazes before his sight; so *then* shall appear the life of each boy or man whose one aim, whose one purpose, has been set on the imitation of his God and Saviour; for though his deeds and words and thoughts here may have been obscured or blackened by the clouds of prejudice or contempt, they shall be made clear and transparent by the shining on them of the Sun of Righteousness.

## SERMON VII.

### False Lights.

PREACHED AT BRADFIELD, THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER, 1883.

"*But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*"—LUKE xi. 42.

I PROPOSE to speak this evening on a subject which is possibly more adapted for the consideration of those among you who are older, and consequently are in positions of responsibility more or less recognized; though I trust by God's help my words may not be above the grasp and comprehension of all.

I suppose that there is always the danger of attributing to the author of any saying, meanings and ideas which he never had in view, but which are forced out of the saying by the caprice or idiosyncrasy of the student. I am afraid this is a danger to which we preachers of the gospel are very liable, so that often words which were written for simple Christian people are wrested out of their proper meaning to

serve some particular aim and object. Of this danger I am sensible.

But, on the other hand, it is a grand internal evidence of the divine origin of our Lord's words, that the more deeply we ponder over them the greater variety of applications they suggest to us; and we are like miners, who find very little near the surface, but the deeper they delve, the richer are the veins of ore or mineral which are discovered, to give wealth, or light, or warmth to the upper world.

Yes, when we think of the sayings of Christ, they seem, without being unduly forced, to adapt themselves to all times and conditions of life, so that the New Testament becomes to the seeker after truth no mere talismanic possession, but a constant book of reference, to which we need never apply in vain to guide us in our ordinary moments, or in the vicissitudes of life.

Let us strive, then, to find to-night in the text before us some practical suggestions as to the guidance of our life.

On a superficial view, Christ appears merely to be reprobating a species of hypocrisy, common to all professors of morality, of insisting on some trivial outward observance to the neglect of some inner truth, of losing sight of the principle while exaggerating formalism, of clinging to the letter but forsaking the spirit. And so in our day this text has often

been made a handle by those who object to high religious ceremonies, declaring that Christ Himself has pronounced them unscriptural; and it has been made use of, as some of us know, by extreme Protestants to point the finger of scorn at Romanism and what is called extreme Ritualism.

Far as we are from having any active sympathy with these particular expressions of religious faith, I cannot think that Christ was thinking much of such tendencies when He uttered the words of the text; and I think such an interpretation or application to be quite superficial, false, and alien to the mind of Christ.

It is perfectly true that Christ was in this particular instance reprobating the conduct of certain Pharisees, who made clean the outside of the cup and platter. It is perfectly true that He was condemning a system of arrant hypocrisy in those enemies of His gospel, in whom the kernel of real religion had long since decayed, and only the barren shell of formalism remained. It is perfectly true that, with divine insight, He further saw that these men had got to that extreme stage at which all persistent sinners ultimately arrive, so that they were quite unconscious of the flagrancy of their own characters in the sight of God.

All this is true; but if we were to stop short here, we should, I think, be very far from estimating all the truth conveyed in this saying of our Lord.

Some of us, perhaps, glibly think that such a crew as that of the Pharisees was an anomaly in history. The more thoughtful of us may go further, and see in some of the characters presented to us in history, and in some whom we know in our own time, men to whom these words of our Lord may not obscurely apply.

But as I ponder over this saying of the Saviour, I cannot but think that much more remains behind, and that this saying, if rightly understood, probes far deeper into the weak places of human nature, and perhaps may apply to ourselves with startling truth.

Observe, first, our Lord does not condemn these tithes of mint and rue; on the contrary, He expressly enjoins them. "These ought ye to have done, *and not to leave the others undone.*"

Yes, the veriest trifles, seemingly light as air, which the law of God, and—if it does not contradict God's law—which the law of man enjoins, these ought ye not to leave undone.

A grand, inspiring, consoling teaching this, when we consider it!

Christ teaches the infinitely vast importance of little duties, the transcendent necessity of seizing and utilizing small opportunities. No act, He seems to tell us, is indifferent; what seems infinitely small in the sight of man is infinitely great in the sight of God; the relative importance of actions is an idea

of our own creation; there is nothing more and nothing less in His sight, to Whom a thousand years are but as one day, and one day as a thousand years.

Yes, it is the most awful truth in life: every action of ours girt around, as it were, by the fluttering of angels' wings, and the hovering near of the spirits of darkness: heaven and hell depending on our slightest word and look and thought; the very laughter that dies away on our lips—dies away and is forgotten—becoming in its effects as the smile of heaven or the sneer of hell.

The common schoolboy jest, the petty actions of our everyday routine, may be—nay, rather, are—the index to the book of our life in the sight of Him to Whom all hearts are open, and from Whom no desires are hid. They are facts whose issues lie in eternity.

And so, as we advance in experience, and get to know our own souls better, the awful reality of life slowly opens and broadens to our gaze, as to the homeward-bound mariner the blurred coast merges into distincter outline; and in some faint and far-off way we discern the tremendous importance of our every thought and act and word; we discern more clearly what we are and whither we are going—the land whither our soul's compass is pointing; we begin to see and realize something of what Christ meant when He said, "Ye ought not to have left the

other undone;" we begin to see something of the righteousness of that terrible truth, "Every idle word that men shall speak they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment;" and we understand something of that command, seemingly so impossible to obey, and yet so necessary to a follower of Christ, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

I think, then, that, so far from this text advocating in the slightest degree a contempt for small observances of ordinary duties, we discover in it rather a sense of their sacredness in the eyes of the divine Teacher.

Observe now the other part of the text: "These ought ye to have done;" that is, observed judgment and the love of God.

The sin of which these Pharisees had been guilty consisted not merely in their inability to recognize the relative importance of various actions, but in the absolute losing sight of all moral principle in the pursuit of some favourite hobby. And though it is a statement which may create surprise, I do not know a sin more absolutely ruinous to the character of those who commit it or to that of the society in which they live. And the perilous danger attending it is absolutely encouraged and fostered by the world in which it lives and festers. Whether it be from indifference or sloth, certain it is that the world is

very kind to its fanatics. Rather than give itself any trouble, it will give way to any project, however inconsiderate, to any principle, however outrageous, which enthusiasts may try to foist upon it.

History teems with deeds of blood wrought by those who, mad on one single point, have, by sheer force of passion, carried mankind into the impetuous current of their will; torturing, condemning, killing their fellow-creatures, all for a tithe of mint or rue, for an idea which in the next age or nation is obsolete or forgotten.

Take the subject of religion, and look at the history of Christendom. What divine insight had Christ when He uttered the words we heard in this morning's lesson, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword;" and we reach down from the shelves of our memories nineteen centuries of dogmatism, persecution, revolution, which have made the soil of Europe blush red with blood. For what? For some obscure point of theology or doctrine which the fanatics of one age have fought over to the death, but the voice of the next has relegated to the sphere of antiquarian lore.

And though, in a spirit of self-satisfaction, we may say that if we had lived in the days of our fathers we should not have killed the prophets, yet look out into the world and see among us the old spirit, scotched but not killed, shut down like the fabled giant beneath

the writhing mountain, and yet like him spitting forth from time to time social venom, political rancour, religious spite.

Oh, if we could only learn early in life, by humble Christian pursuit after knowledge, the due proportion which things bear to each other; if we could look, in the spirit of Christ, kindly on the efforts of others toiling in the cause of good, and understand that if they are not against us they are on our part; if we could only learn how contemptible and sinful in the sight of God, how ruinous to the society in which men move, is that spirit of narrow-mindedness which mistakes names for things, and opinions for characters, which exaggerates and widens differences, which forms parties and sects, which condemns other modes of thought too often because it is too ignorant to understand them,—then the world would become a fair garden of God instead of a howling wilderness of sin, and men around us would by the Christian alchemy of love be transformed into fit denizens of an earthly paradise.

But, you say, what connection has all this with our school life here? What connection is there between paying tithes of mint and rue and neglecting judgment and the love of God, and the wants and dangers of a public school?

I will tell you. There is no spirit which grows so slowly, and which is so rare in youth, as that of

rightly regarding the relative proportions which things should bear to one another, and yet it is one which is of vital importance to such a life as we are leading here.

Let us take an analogy which perhaps some of you may have observed. The new-born child has no perception of distance or proportion of size at all. A light is brought into the room; it clutches at it when it is yards away, fancying it can seize it with its tiny fingers. It has no idea of comparison; it invests its nurse and parents with all the attributes which a riper intelligence bestows only on a higher Being. It has no control over itself or its emotions; it is by turns passionate, peaceful, vengeful, and loving. And infant life, in this wilful, inconsiderate state, is a very pathetic picture which attracts rather than repels. But alas! this temper of mind, or rather lack of mind, lasts in too many cases far into boyhood, yes, often far into manhood, so that by sad experience I can understand what the most famous schoolmaster who ever lived meant when he said, "The one aim and object of my life here has been, so far as in me lay, to hasten the time from childhood to manhood . . . to form Christian men, for Christian boys I can scarcely hope to make."

Yes, to supplant barbaric impulse by Christian principle; to teach the relative value which the things of life ought to bear to one another; to teach

you not merely to obey rules, but *why* you should obey them; to make you estimate the wide gulf which separates good from evil, truth from falsehood, righteousness from sin—a gulf widening as your experience widens day by day;—that is the great object of education, that should be the great aim of our endeavours here.

And to you, who are placed by your position in the school in a sphere of responsibility, we look for support in this humanizing, Christianizing work, through the influence you exert, which is in some respects wider than *we* can ever hope to gain. To your hands are committed the destinies of your younger brothers. As you value your own soul's welfare, abuse not this mighty trust.

A philosopher lately passed away taught the world that the human form, now so grand in its godlikeness, was evolved through ages from a nerveless chaotic mass at the bottom of the ocean-bed. And there is a moral protoplasm lying inert in the first dawn of a child's being which it is your duty as well as ours to make grow into the substance of a stalwart Christian man.

Yes, the voice of God in the book of nature, no less than His voice as it breathes from His inspired Word, calls us to do this work, the work of teaching and of learning by precept and example the relative value which things should bear in our life; not to be

bitter opponents of rules, but conscientious followers of order; not to be ignorant dogmatists, but to be patient seekers after the truth; not to be arrogant partisans of sects or factions, but to be humble followers of Christ, and true, large-souled citizens of the Christian commonwealth.

## SERMON VIII.

### The Responsibilities of Public School Life.

PREACHED AT BRADFIELD, SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION DAY, 1883.

"*For none of us liveth to himself.*"—ROM. xiv. 7.

THERE is no characteristic more prominent in a public school than its liability to change; and certainly in no society does this tendency produce greater or more marked effects.

There is hardly an individual among you who was here four or five years ago; and scarcely one, perhaps, sitting here to-night but will have left these walls for the ordinary avocations of the world involved by growing manhood, when five more years have passed away.

And along with this fact there is another, namely, that notwithstanding this change in individual members, there is a continuity of the corporate system, substantial identity in the principles pervading the whole, similarity of methods, customs, and rules, and apparent sameness in the ideas which give it its peculiar colouring and distinctness.

And these two phenomena, the perpetual change of individual members, and on the other hand the continuity of the system, are to my mind what constitute the peculiar advantages and dangers attending the life of a public school.

Let us this evening take as our subject of consideration one only, but perhaps the most conspicuous, of the ways in which these advantages and dangers manifest themselves: the formation of public opinion by individual influence.

It is indeed a truth of philosophic no less than of religious import, that truth contained in the words of Scripture, "None of us liveth to himself."

You may remember how I pointed out to you last Sunday evening that the modification of one seemingly insignificant natural phenomenon, such as the unbidden rise of a wave one foot higher on the seashore, or one errant dewdrop on the petal of a sleeping flower, might have, nay, must have, effects on the whole future constitution of the natural world, which will last in undiminished power until time be merged into eternity.

Take an illustration. That great work of modern engineering which has connected the oceans of India and Europe, has already had large influence on the climate of the arid land through which the thin stream flows; plants and shrubs have sprung up on the desert's verge wherever the water has found its

way, and their moisture absorbed in rain-clouds which, downfalling in their turn, are rapidly converting by nutrient showers deserts into gardens; so that thousands of miles away, in the upper valley of Nile, the inhabitants get now twelve days of rain in the year instead of three—a tremendous consequence, which will grow and grow as ages roll away.

And if a comparatively insignificant modification of the earth's surface has results like these, so, too, does the same truth hold good of the moral facts of the universe.

"No man liveth to himself," says Scripture. "Man is a creature of social instincts," says philosophy.

Given this, trace the history of an idea. See it rising formless at first as the foam-born goddess from her ocean-cradle, dawning on the mind of a man as the first faint glow breaks on the morning hills, a speck on the horizon of his soul, as the finger-cloud seen from the heights of Carmel, but gradually shaping itself into a thought. See the thought sometimes gradually, sometimes suddenly, from seemingly accidental causes, converted into an act. See the act dwelling alone, fearful at first of its own existence, but then going about freely, and taking to itself brother acts like to itself. There is the habit. And then see the habit, small at first as is the snowflake on the mountain height, but, moved by some passing breath of wind, it begins to roll down,

gathering volume and velocity till it sweeps an irresistible avalanche on the plain below. It is habit, sweeping the whole man with it till it is rolled into his destiny.

But my picture ends not here. One might imagine a world peopled by one man alone, of which such a history might be true—a formless idea ending in destiny—an awful truth.

But go farther and imagine these formless ideas, these thoughts, these acts, these habits, crossing, combining, interlacing, modifying the ideas, and thoughts, and acts, and habits of even one other man, and what huge possibilities of destiny even for the two does the picture open out to us! But when we penetrate farther still, and see how in his walk through life, by tongue, or pen, or act, he touches the skirts, as it were, of millions of his fellow-men, and through them of vast generations yet unborn, the mind can grasp no more, except to realize, in some faint and far-off way, how awful a thing—awful by the very indefiniteness of its power—it is *to live.*

But I said at the beginning of my sermon that individual influence in the formation of public opinion was perhaps the most striking feature in public school life, and that it arose from the continual change in individual members.

Compare it with the influence exercised by ordinary home-life in after years. There each man creates a

small society of his own in his domestic circle; the idiosyncrasy of his own ideas reigns supreme; his vices and virtues have a limited range, and modify the character of his sons and daughters; and though it is most true that every thought and act and habit has, as I have endeavoured to point out, an undying influence on generations who live and die ages after his bones have crumbled to nothingness, yet in the vast majority of instances his powers are limited by the daily wants of existence, which keep him in a groove and determine his characteristics.

But supposing that from a hundred different homes, permeated with different ideas as every home must be, there are sent to one place a hundred boys of different characteristics, partly of individual, partly of home growth, at an age when the mind is plastic, desires eager and yet unformed; and these boys not merely meeting, recollect, at stated intermittent times as men do in the field, in business, or in Parliament, but in a continual and, as it were, forced society, with one another. Why, it is a kaleidoscope of social life and manners such as has never existed, except perhaps in some sorts of monastic life, in any country but our own; and its effects are such as are apparent now in the characteristics of English society; so that you will not perhaps think it an exaggeration to say that the future moral well-being or ruin of England lies in the character of the public schools of England.

Yes, it is a fact fraught with the most tremendous importance, that here we are living, as members of a public school, in the midst of a society from which we cannot escape, which is forming our manners and characters; and we too are each of us forming by our individual influence the manners and character of the whole society, and through that society are modifying the character of the nation, which has converted the world into an English emporium.

Your influence, I say, is incalculable; each one who comes or leaves us, leaves his mark, which is not like the footstep on the sea-shore, obliterated by the waves of time, but which is as indelible as the writings which trace your life in the record-book of God.

Can you deny this influence? What, then, is that electric sympathy which runs through a crowd stirred by the impassioned pleadings of an orator? What that magnetic thrill which moves an army onward to the battle as if it were one man? What, then, that subtle influence which, whether under the name of psychic force or animal magnetism, bends the will of one man to another's? It is all one. Each one of you has the same silently forming influence, incalculable on a society composed like this, where one term is so like another and yet so unlike; like, in that laws, and methods, and institutions, and (most powerful of all) traditions, remain unchanged; unlike, in that indi-

viduals come and go, leaving their influences behind as stings or blessings.

And thus it is that an institution like this has something in it of pathos, something of grandeur; it is pathetic because one by one we go away into the outside world, and disappear in the crowd for good or for ill, sometimes with our characters written open upon our faces, or gathered within the secret compass of the mind; it is grand because we are one of those corporations scattered up and down the land which, in my opinion, will make or will mar the future of England.

You ask a lesson. "Spartam nactus es, hanc exorna." You are citizens of no mean city; adorn it with your life. "None of us liveth to himself."

And when you have left here, and passed out into the world, and have had your meed of this world's dower—prosperity, it may be, or failure, something of happiness, perhaps much of affliction; when manhood yields to old age, when age sinks into a quiet grave, and when in that judgment morning the dead are waked, and the thrones set, and the books are opened, and it be asked of you, as it will be asked of every judged soul, "What hast thou done? what has been thy influence on thy brother's life?" will it avail you aught to use the murderer's plea, "Am I my brother's keeper?" This answer shall be your condemnation: "None of us liveth to himself—thou art the murderer of thy brother's soul."

And do I see here to-night any one who takes the Name of God in vain, who has perhaps this day sullied his lips by cursing or swearing? I mark *you* as being the murderer of your brother's soul.

Do I see one here whose tongue is tainted with utterance of obscenity or guilty suggestion? You are murdering the eternal life of some of those little ones for whom Christ died.

Do I see one here whose heart is black with ingratitude, with deceit, with guile, with cheating, with lying, with spite and hatred, who makes away with what does not belong to him (he does not call it *stealing!*), or whose hands are lifted high against authority, and whose secret, skulking acts of disobedience are the more attractive because they are a defiance of the laws—laws on which alone a society like this can subsist?

I say to such a one, You are a traitor to the society to which you belong, and, though you think scorn of it, you are ruining the immortal souls of many who may hereafter tread in your steps here.

But what shall I say of those who have lived out their lives here with the fear of God before their eyes, and with the knowledge in their hearts, though they may never have formulated it with their lips, that none of us liveth to himself, and that the future destiny, not only of their fellows, but of the world beyond these walls, may be altered and

sweetened by the example of one pure and blameless life?

To such a one no need to hold out the guerdon of golden promises, of fair success in this life, of crowns hereafter. To the true Christian, holiness is its own great reward, and him alone no fears or promises can frighten or convince. To him it will be no strange thing to enter heaven, for he will have been living on earth in the things of heaven; here, as there, he will ever be with the Lord.

## SERMON IX.

### The Meaning of Prayer.

PREACHED AT BRADFIELD, FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER, 1883.

"*O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.*"—MATT. xxvi. 39.

As Moses ascended the mount of God with veiled head and unshod feet, so I think, with feelings of timidity and awe, should the Christian of refined sensibilities touch upon the subject of prayer.

There are some men, indeed, so rough-hewn by nature that they display the panorama of their religious life with the same unreserve and unconcern which they expect from others on the same great subject. These men often charge the world in general with being ashamed to be thought Christians; and, to show that they themselves are not so, have a jerky and familiar way of approaching religious subjects, which their neighbours and themselves falsely, but unconsciously, put down to Christian enthusiasm. Now, I think this charge of being ashamed which these men make, though too often, of course, true, yet often worries really religious men of refined

feeling, who have an instinctive objection to talking much, if at all, of subjects of eternal interest, and they begin to think that their reticence proceeds from other than the true cause, viz. their natural delicacy of feeling.

I dare say many of us have come across some of these rough-hewn people, good, worthy men and women in their way, often enthusiastic on certain points, excellent teachers, profound believers, furnished with an admirable apparatus of theological formulæ to dislodge or confound opponents of the faith. Now, such men, however worthy, lack, I think, one thing: they lack delicacy; that is, tact and taste, which can distinguish things essential from things subordinate—qualities which, I venture to think, are of no less vital importance in approaching religious subjects than they are in other relations of life. Such tact and taste are not in themselves virtues—many virtuous men are without them, and get on well without them; but they are, as it were, the bloom on the fruit of godliness which tells of the ripeness within.

There is no subject, perhaps, in which some of us display less tact and taste than in putting before others the necessity of prayer. We offend, we alienate, we drive away people by injudicious talk on the matter; and those of us who are engaged in religious work know by experience that there is no

more delicate or dangerous ground on which we can tread in our ministrations. We often seem to pray *at* people, instead of praying *with* them. It is for this reason that in my addresses to you from time to time I have dwelt more on practical duties, and common temptations and dangers, than on the divine power and instrument by which we alone perform the one and avoid the other; so that, because I have been reticent on it, or because I approach it now with trembling lips, do not think that I disparage its holy significance or under-estimate its vital importance.

To-night, however, I wish to say a few words to you on this subject, treating it, as far as may be, with a reverent hand. I do not propose, then, to dwell on what our Saviour meant by asking that the cup of suffering should be taken from Him, but I wish to extract from the latter part of the text, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt," what prayer really means and what it does not mean.

I gather, first, that there is an erroneous view of prayer, which negatives "*as I will.*" There is a common belief in the world that prayer is the means by which our wishes can determine and alter the will of God; that, given the requisite amount of faith, we can obtain all we pray for. Now, in the text it is distinctly said that this is not the meaning of prayer. "Not as I will," *i.e.* the wish of man does not alter or determine the will of God.

Look at the universe, and what is it but one huge system of fixed laws—one vast chain, from which, if you strike one single link, you snap the whole? Take an instance. You pray for fine weather to-morrow, that your day's amusement or occupation may be carried out without interruption. The farmer prays for rain to penetrate further into the ground, and make his crop shoot up into strength before the heat of summer.[1] Which prayer is to be satisfied? What is injurious to you is beneficial to the farmer; what satisfies you, the farmer deplores; so that if a prayer has any power to determine or alter the will of God, the one who does not obtain his wish must mourn, doubting God's favour, or believing that he does not pray with sufficient faith. But when we get to know God's ways, when we discover that He acts by fixed laws, when we watch the phenomena of the moving heavens, and contemplate the affinities which exist between every gust of wind that blows and the storm-tossed billows of the restless deep, then we begin also to see that to get such prayers as we have spoken of answered, would be nothing less than to alter the whole world's history from its creation till now; and to pray for such things as these is to expect that God will place the whole harmonious system of His universe at the disposal of one human being.

[1] For many of the thoughts in this sermon I am indebted to the late Rev. F. W. Robertson.

Suppose Canute, instead of bidding the waves to retire at his pleasure, had prayed God to exercise His power and check the approaching sea, the petition would have savoured little less of impiety than his own imperious command. And so, too, that band of mistaken Christians, who, when some they love are ill, instead of seeking such medicines as God has put into our hands to use, lay their hands on the sick, and expect that God will exercise His mercy in some miraculous way, without any efforts of their own to restore the patient to health, are guilty of impious outrage on the majesty of God. Fever and pestilence ravage town or country; do you think it is of any avail to sit with hands folded (even though they be folded in prayer), and neglect to drain, to disinfect, or to take any precaution which can arrest disease or restore life?

When by premature debauchery, or self-indulgence, or sloth, your frame is wasted, your health gone, and the springs of your existence poisoned, think you that God will help you aught, however much you pray to Him, if at the same time you still persist in ruining your body and murdering your energies by continued sin? No, no! no prayer of yours, however heartfelt for the time, can change your destiny, can change the clear laws of God, if you persist in changing not the evil of your life, and thus insult the Majesty on high.

If this, then, be an erroneous view of prayer, what

is its true meaning, what is its efficacy? It is this: "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt." Yes, the meaning of prayer is not that human wishes can thereby determine or alter the divine, but that human wishes are thereby bent in resignation more and more perfectly to the will of God. Yes, the efficacy of prayer consists in resignation; and that life is the most holy where there is least of petition and most of resignation, till we can conceive of such a state, even on earth, where petition ends and resignation takes its place. For what we in our blindness call unanswered prayer may be for us eternal triumph, while prayer answered may sometimes become never-ending bitterness.

You remember the story of the Argive mother, who, carried to Juno's feast by her two sons when the horses failed, prayed to the Queen of Heaven that for their filial piety her darlings might receive the richest guerdon that Heaven could bestow; and how, in answer to her prayer, when the night fell on her sleeping sons, death fell on them too, lifting them far from evil fate, and making them glad with great gladness, and the hapless mother saw that the goddess had been too bountiful. It is a fable, pregnant with a lesson for us; we cannot tell how often our petitions, if granted, might, like swords of wrath, sweep away sweeter mercies from our path, leaving us shorn, defenceless, and alone.

We lift up the veil which conceals that evening scene in the garden of Gethsemane, and what do we see? We see a marvellous mystery, that God granted not the prayer of His own dear Son—a mystery unfathomable by aught else than by the explanation that ungranted prayer is sometimes eternal triumph. "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt." And the cup passed not from Him. He went forth to meet His doom. That was His eternal triumph. A teaching fraught with precious truth when our prayers are unanswered. We must go to meet the evil.

Look forward with me and see what awaits us in the coming time. We are as travellers standing on the edge of a vast forest, looking down some glade cutting through the midst — it is our path. Near us the sun throws interlacing lights through the arching trees; as the eye looks onward the darkness grows apace, and all we can see are gnarled roots against which we fear we may stumble in the dusk, and briers that may tear our faces as we press on. Further on we cannot pierce through its primeval gloom; we must take a lantern to guide our way. That forest glade is our future; and for each one in this congregation we may predict this, that there lie before him the roots of temptation and the briers of affliction. No single man or woman or boy in this congregation but will have his meed of sorrows;

loved ones dropping from his side in the lonely path, or stragglers wandering from him, are lost amid the tangled darkness, and temptations trip up his own feet, of lust and sloth and hate. But there is a lantern which we can take, and which will guide us safe through all, bringing us at last to the regions of the Sun of Righteousness, when that light will be needed no more. That light is prayer, without which here you may, nay, *must* be lost, but which will be needless in that land of fruition, when temptations, sorrows, and longings shall flee away; where there shall be no night, for the Sun of Righteousness shall illumine it, and when God shall wipe away the tears from all eyes.

And this lantern, have you it in your grasp, or is it quenched in the black and tangled wandering of your life? To you I ask to-night this question, Do you ever pray? Have the wishes of your hearts gone with the words you uttered even here this night? For you may as well kneel down and worship gods of stone as offer to the living God a prayer which consists of words and nothing else, mere mumbling incantations signifying nothing to your hearts. Can it be said of you as to the disobedient nation, "These people draw nigh unto Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me"? Do you ever pray strugglingly as did the sleeping patriarch, wrestling in dreams with God? Do you pray continually, as

did the watcher standing on Carmel's height, in knee-bowed prayer, scanning the brazen sky, till from the sea the cloud-formed hand blackened the whole horizon, and filled the thirsty earth with floods of life and joy? Do you ever pray painfully, as did the dear Redeemer, till the blood-like drops of agony started from His brow? This, this alone is prayer—the struggle of the spirit with its Maker, and yet complete submission to His almighty will.

And naught else but the practice of prayer can make our lives noble and godlike, not merely when temptations assail us, or sorrow darkens the brow, but also when joy transfigures and happiness sweetens our life. If we have never really prayed, let us thus pray to-night—

O Father, hear our prayer, and forgive its weakness. We know and feel how mean and unworthy is the trembling sacrifice we pour before thee. Cold are our warmest vows, and vain our truest. Our lips repeat but our hearts forget. We see Thy hand and hear Thy voice; they lead and counsel us for awhile, and then we turn away; yet still Thou forgivest our blindness. Who can resist Thy gentle call, O Father Almighty, appealing to us now, inviting, not by terrors, but by smiles of mercy, the wandering and the fallen? Father and Saviour, plant within each of us the seeds of holiness, and bid them blossom in the beauty of eternal spring, till at the last Thou

placest us in those everlasting gardens where the angels walk, and where every flower that creeps through the dark gate of death withers not, but becomes immortal. Amen.

# SERMON X.

## Nicodemus.

PREACHED AT BRADFIELD, FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, 1883.

"*There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto Him, Rabbi, we know that Thou art a Teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*"—JOHN iii. 1–3.

THOSE of us who believe that the books of the New Testament are not so much productions mechanically dictated to holy men as to mere amanuenses by a Higher Being, but that they are the writings of men of different characters and bents of mind, inspired and acted upon, indeed, by the Spirit of God, but coloured by the characteristics of their respective authors,—those of us who believe this, cannot have helped noticing that the Gospel of St. John has a strong individuality of its own, and that not only in the peculiarities of its style, but also in the matters which it recounts, it occupies a place quite apart from

and yet supplementary to the memoirs of our Lord's life recorded elsewhere.

While in the other Gospels the facts of our Lord's external life, His associates, His temptations, His miracles, occupy at least as prominent a place as His moral teaching, you will find St. John's writings, on the other hand, speak less of His active life and more of His discourses, and, if we may reverently say it, of the internal workings of His mind; and thus some personages who do not figure at all in the other Gospels are brought before us here as affording occasions for the spiritual teaching of our Lord.

Now, Nicodemus is one of them; his name does not occur elsewhere but in the Gospel of St. John, where he is mentioned three times—first in the passage before us, once in the seventh chapter, where he pleads the cause of justice for Christ against the irrational fury of the Pharisees, and thirdly in the nineteenth chapter, where he is described as bringing offerings for the embalming of our Lord's body. Of the man and his character we know nothing beyond what these passages supply; but I think we can gather from them some facts which may perhaps help us to realize the portrait of a man who seems to me to be invested with more than ordinary interest.

It is remarkable that in both the two later passages in which he appears, he is introduced by the descrip-

tion, " He that came to Jesus by night." Particular emphasis, therefore, is clearly meant to be laid on this fact, and the cause is not, I think, far to seek.

It required no little courage for a man brought up under the shadow of the Jewish law, a professor of the strictest code of legal discipline, to break away from the traditions of his party so far as to frequent openly the society of a revolutionary teacher of the most dangerous kind. We, who live in an age when the profession of Christianity is a passport to the society of respectable men, may consider this coming by night a craven fear on the part of Nicodemus, and may possibly consider that we should not have been ashamed of confessing Jesus in broad daylight. But this, I venture to think, is because we cannot realize the facts of the case. How should we like to-day to throw our characters into the fire, and to be pointed at with the finger of scorn by our fellows, by associating familiarly with a notorious atheist, or even by walking arm-in-arm with one below us in social rank? Nay, if I am not much mistaken, there is many a one in this congregation who, when he grows up and estimates the value the world sets on the outward appearance of things and men, would shrink from contact with a man no less pure, no less worthy, no less Christ-like, than himself, simply because he is well known to hold opinions on any social, or political, or religious questions which may happen

to be unfashionable and to be considered dangerous in the world.

Bigotry! bigotry! What crimes have been done in this name! what offences against the Most High! There rises before the mind the spectre of annals steeped in crime, of bloody persecutions, of a long roll of martyred men, lightly butchered in the Name of God, from the dread morning of Calvary up to our own civilized century; yes, and no less wickedly or bloodily are characters in this our own age—lives and characters—arraigned, judged, and condemned at the bar of human ignorance and prejudice.

Bigotry! No greater responsibility can, I conceive, devolve on those who profess to train the minds of others than that of inculcating abhorrence of bigotry, in whatever form disguised. That is a true aim of education.

We shall have a far stronger and truer conception of the mind and life of Christ, if, while we hold fast by the great principles of virtue and religious truth with which the accident of birth has gifted us, we yet concede to others who differ from us something of that divine charity which uttered the sublime command on which I once addressed you from this place: "Forbid him not; for he that is not against us is for us."

Leaving out, then, any description of the growth of Nicodemus' attachment to Christ and His cause, as

exemplified by his open defence of Him among the Pharisees, and his subsequent offerings of devotion to the crucified Redeemer, let us touch more nearly on the words of the text.

First then, notice: The words of Nicodemus give us a reason why he has been attracted to the person of Christ, "Rabbi, we know that Thou art a Teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him." Here is a distinct principle of belief—the working of miracles as an attestation of divine power.

It deserves thinking about. Some of you know that on no point has the Christian faith been more commonly attacked than on what is called the incredibility of miracles, and wise and good men have often been sorely puzzled how to carry conviction to others on this subject.

As the sphere of knowledge opens, there dawns on the mind of the patient inquirer into nature the conviction that everywhere is to be seen the law of cause and effect working in uninterrupted and fixed sequence; there is no suspension, no stay: the voiceful thunder, the earthquake, the pestilence, the comet, all seemingly extraordinary phenomena, can be traced as the results of perfectly natural causes; and yet we are told to believe that once, in the earlier ages of the world, these laws of nature were continually changed and modified by the will of the

Creator. And so the sincere believer often falls back upon the book of God's Word, and says "Here inquiry must end, and faith must begin."

Now, it is perfectly true that faith should be the barrier by which to withstand the onslaughts of unbelief, but it should be the faith born of intelligence; and I have often thought that good men do harm, as champions of the Christian cause, by not taking their stand bravely on the battle-field of reason, and by entrenching themselves instead behind what may prove, after all, the feeble bulwarks of contented ignorance.

Is it not conceivable, nay, is it not altogether consistent with the ways of God's providence, that at different periods of the world's history He should make Himself known to men in ways varying according to their intelligence, and that He should accommodate Himself in the manifestations of His power to their progressive knowledge? And so, just as in the earlier ages, when the knowledge of natural laws was an unknown science, He displayed His power to them by suspending those laws over which He reigns supreme, so in after ages, when men could bear it, and the light of knowledge streamed on them from on high, He gradually taught them that the most stupendous miracle of all is not the suspension, but the uninterrupted sequence, of the laws of the universe; so that, though in the garden of Paradise,

amid the thunders of Horeb and the wonders of Ajalon, on the rocks of Meribah or the heights of Carmel, in the pool of Siloam or by storm-tossed Galilee, and in that dread hour when the veil of the temple was rent, and the graves were split asunder, men heard the voice of God and felt His presence; yet no less stupendously now, by the blossoms of spring and the winter shroud, by the alternations of day and gloom, by the deep-buried treasures which yield us health and light, by the electric forces captured and confined by men, by those peaceful sentinels of the night which twinkle whole worlds away, does the continuity of Nature's Law reveal to us the power of Nature's God.

The life of the world is like the life of a boy. It begins in wonder; with large-eyed ignorance it gazes, indulging in superlatives. Everything is so great and God so near. The baby-world puts forth its tiny hand, and grasping but few things, thinks they are all that exist. You see traces of this in the uneducated grown-up men and women of our own day, who gape and wonder at ordinary things, and think every trivial tale, or incident, or piece of gossip is wondrous strange. They live in superlatives. And then comes the time when the vast designs of nature break through the windows of the soul, like the high sun through prison-bars, and the young world, like the young boy, begins to think. In the boy you can

detect this period in the eager, restless mind, perhaps in an unsatisfied and discontented spirit; in the world you can read it throughout the history of the last five hundred years, in a tone of gradually increasing inquiry, and the pondering and doubting over nature's book, as it slowly unfolds and discovers itself.

And as the first age was one of superlatives, so this is one of comparatives: everything is analyzed, sifted, contrasted, compared.

But the third age is to come—the age of simple ascertained truth. Yes, the imagination reaches forward to that day in the long future, enveloped yet in the clouds of night and mist, when the plenitude of knowledge shall come, and men who puzzle now over the secondary causes of nature, and probe into their depths, shall soar into the height of the throne of knowledge, where the Giver of all shall be discovered in His beauty and power; just as on the individual man of decaying age, whom years of searching after knowledge have clouded and cast into gloom, there breaks the evening sunlight of illuminating and positive truth—and then he stands in the presence of his God.

You may think this to be a departure from my text, but I have but anticipated the meaning of the answer given to Nicodemus by Christ.

Nicodemus practically says, "Rabbi, I believe you to be a Teacher come from God, because you have

wrought miracles." What is Christ's reply? "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." There is seemingly and at first sight no connection between the words of Nicodemus and those of our Lord. But the answer of Christ means this: Miracles have brought you to the feet of Christ; but this is an inversion of what ought to be the case. Believe in My spiritual teaching; miracles are adjuncts to convince the duller soul ignorant of My true beauties. Adapt your life to My teaching first; the belief in My miracles should follow, not precede. Change the attitude of your soul, and all the rest will follow. Believe in My divinity from this My teaching, not from My acts.

Yes, this is Christ's answer to the inquiring Pharisee, an exact counterpart to His words in another place, "Whether is it easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Arise and walk?" an exact counterpart to the answer given to the prayer of the despairing nobleman, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe."

It seems as if Christ always disparaged and thought little of these manifestations of His power, as things away from which men should gradually be weaned and educated; that a time should come when the Christianized world should no longer need them.

And yet to-day He says to us again, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." It is a

mournful truth, full of meaning to us in our younger days. We go on day after day putting off the time for repentance, till perhaps, in the full career of guilt and independence, even when we are climbing the hillside of life, and scarce have brushed away with upward feet the dews of youth's morning, Death confronts us and wraps us in his shroud, and hurries us away—whither?

Or, if the goodness of God so wills it, He scourges us with signs and wonders. It may be the sudden snapping of fond associations; it may be by the blasting of character or fortune; so that it is by external force, such as of the miracles of old, meant merely for slumbering souls, that we are led to the feet of Christ, with the dregs of a ruined and dishonoured life to give Him.

Sudden conversions these are called—a rough earth-bound remedy applied perforce to souls—preached up by the ignorant, and popular with the depraved, but often a doubtful two-edged advantage even to those who have experienced them.

Nay, there is a more excellent way, which Christ has taught us in His own bright words: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Yes, heaven is easy for the young, thorny and arduous for the old. May God in His mercy grant that you may enter the kingdom of heaven upon

earth, and be born again, before the rust and dross and turmoil of the world has blunted the edge of your soul; before the summer come, and the harvest pass, and still you be not saved; before you stand, like the foolish virgins, before the door of life and find it shut; before the night cometh, when no man can work.

## SERMON XI.

### Guests of God.

PREACHED AT BRADFIELD, SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, 1883.

"*Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.*"—LUKE xiv. 22.

WHEN we are told that the sayings of our Lord are susceptible of more than one application, we must be quite sure what is meant. If by such a statement it be implied that Christ had in His mind when He spoke two or three different subjects, entirely disconnected with each other, we shall, I think, be often led astray, and be induced to forsake the plains of fact for the realms of fancy.

If, on the other hand, it be merely meant that we can discover in His teachings deep underlying principles which lend themselves to different phases of human history, and valuable for our own individual guidance, then, I think, the statement becomes at once practical, true, and full of force.

Now, in dealing with the parables, this distinction between that *to* which Christ applies them, and that

which He implies *in* them, is particularly important; and I think we ought to be rather distrustful of those interpretations which tell us that any given parable applies primarily to one thing and secondarily to something else; till Christ's words almost lose their meaning, and the interpretations have no more identity with the original than the elm tree has with those interlacing shadows which the sun throws from it on to the lawn, chequered into varying fantastic shapes as the evening deepens.

Now this parable Christ is, beyond all doubt, applying not primarily but *altogether* to a distinct, historical fact—the rejection of divine truth by the Jews, and the free offer of it to the Gentile world. He is not referring, I think, to any other episode in the history of mankind or of individuals; but, on the other hand, it is none the less true that beneath the shell of historical allusion there is contained the kernel of an implied principle; viz., that individual responsibility varies according to the circumstances in which the Divine Providence has placed us.

With this safeguard then against misinterpretation of our Lord's meaning, the subject may rightly be divided into two parts.

I. The national apostasy of the Jews.

II. Individual responsibility.

I. Of all the mysterious ways in which God has dealt with men, there is none at first sight more

mysterious than that in which He endowed them with the knowledge of Himself. The majesty and attributes of God did not blaze into the world in a sudden flood of light, as does the sun in some tropic region, when the gloom of midnight becomes alchemized in a minute into day; but rather like the pale star, twinkling at first on the spur of a solitary mountain height, His attributes slowly dawned on one obscure and struggling nation in a corner of the earth, and even in His manifestations to them He accommodated Himself, as I endeavoured to point out last Sunday, to the progressive intelligence of man.

Yes, the Jews were intended to be, in the language of the parable, the favoured guests of God, the first-called recipients of God's bounty. And notice that this call of the Jews to the supper of the great King was no sudden thing done once for all. From the dawn of their history to the day of Christ's death, the voice of God was sounding in their ears—Come to the supper, come to the feast; that is, to a revelation of My divine bounty which I have prepared for you from the beginning of the world. They heard it in the cradle of patriarchal life, in the call of Abraham, in the prison of Egyptian exile, in the pillared fire of the desert, in the cloven waters of Jordan, amid their chequered history in the Promised Land, from the lips of judges and prophets, in the songs of wailing by Babylonian waters, in their Zion

wasted and profaned, in the decay and wreck of national decrepitude. Along the ages the voice of God's messengers called to them in various tones, but they would not come. In the language of the parable, "They all with one consent began to make excuse."

Read of their murmurings in Egypt and in the desert against the hand of God, of their clamour for a temporal prince, of the schisms of a divided people, of their secret rebellion or open idolatry; read of their degraded theology, haunted only by the ghost of dead forms and outworn superstitions; read of the disputations of Pharisee and Sadducee, squabbles in which the good grain of religion had long since decayed, and only the husk of fanaticism remained,—and you will understand what Christ meant when He said, "They all with one consent began to make excuse."

It was a national apostasy; the Jews were left to their fate by the God Whose feast they had rejected.

Of this apostasy what were the consequences?

Now I think we should be probing the meaning of the parable too critically if we inferred that it was *only* on the refusal of the bidden guests that room was found for others; and certainly we have no warrant for saying that the Gentile world was admitted into covenant with God *solely* in consequence of the apostasy of the Jews—that the Church of Christ was erected on the ruins of Jerusalem. I at least cannot

dare to think that in the great and beneficent designs of God there was not from the beginning present to His mind the gradual extension of His kingdom over the hearts of men, or that, even when the imagination unrolls the scroll of time, and passes in review myriads of men and women who lived and died before the dawn of Christianity, traces of God's finger in the world, aye, and traces of Christ's Spirit in the lives of men, cannot be discovered, whether that Spirit be buried deep down beneath the thoughts of immortal sages, or outlined in the simple faith of the untutored savage "who saw God in clouds and heard Him in the wind." But yet I conceive it no less true of the human race that they were in the streets and lanes of the city, resting indeed on the outskirts of high and glorious truths, but not yet in the inner circle whose centre is the Son of God; that they were awaiting Christ's messengers to call to them and say, "Come, for all things are now ready."

And who are they that the great Householder bids be summoned to His feast? "Bring in hither the poor, the maimed, and the halt, and the blind." And as we look into the streets and lanes of the city of God, what strange multitudes do we see answering that call! From the squalor and bestial stye of sin we see the poor,—the poor in character, the weak in principle, in rags stained and sordid by contact with the filth of earth, with the fleeting remnants of an

existence to be devoted to God, yet dragging their weary limbs along and answering the messenger—

> "Just as I am, without one plea,
> But that Thy blood was shed for me,
> And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee—
> O Lamb of God, I come."

We see the maimed and scarred in character, with the staring spots of guilt that nothing but the blood of Christ can wash away, with bowed head and face hidden in the folds of the mantle of charity, yet hurrying along the King's highway; we see the halt man awakened by the voice of the preacher, but oft tripping and falling over the stumbling-blocks of doubt and despair, yet gathering himself together again for a fresh start with limbs more bruised and broken than before, and struggling on to the threshold of the King; we see the man blinded by the blows of adversity, by afflictions of mind and body and estate, groping his sightless way along the narrow lane of life, with other senses more keen and perfect because he sees not, hearing more clearly the ringing tones of the messenger, "Come to the supper," and answering with tear-choked voice of resignation, "Thy way, not mine, O Lord, however dark it be." And as human souls stream onwards through the palace door, the servant saith, "Lord, it is done as Thou hast commanded, and yet there is room;" and the voice of the Master is heard answering, "Go out

into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that My house may be filled."

"And yet there is room." And as we gaze, the human horizon broadens to the view. Far beyond the city walls, far beyond the bounds of Church and sect, we see a great multitude, that no man can number, of all kingdoms, and nations, and ages, and tongues, who, though in their life's wandering they never heard the voice of Christ, yet had the image of their Creator imprinted in their hearts. I see them, a strange and nameless band, hurrying in at the summons to the feast, and the portals of the heavenly mansion flung open wide to welcome the guests of God.

That is the parable; now listen for a few moments to the principle bearing on ourselves.

II. Individual responsibility—to-day is this Scripture preached in your ears. We, as Christian men and boys, are among the first bidden guests of God. The voice of God—varying according to our circumstances, according to our temptations, according to our guilt or innocence—has called to all and at many times, "Come, for all things are now ready—come." Do you ask where? Come to the palace of God's love—love broader than the trackless air, love deeper than ever plummet sounded, love higher than the overarching firmament reaching into blue infinity; cast off for ever the rags of impurity and sin; put on the festal robe of holiness, and feast

on the peace of God which passeth all understanding. Do *you* with one consent begin to make excuse—excuses varying as your enjoyments and your sins dictate? Do I hear one saying, "I must get my living first by head or hands—plenty of time to think about religion afterwards. I pray thee have *me* excused"? Another thinks, "I will get as much pleasure as I can when I am young; I will come to Christ when I am older. I pray thee have *me* excused." Another says, or breathes it to himself, hardly daring to formulate it in words, "I have this or that particular sin which I cannot at present shake off. I pray thee have *me* excused."

Yes, the dawn comes, and you say that life is too fair and beautiful at present to go to Christ; and the fierce noonday sun beats down, and you say it is too hot to go; and the shadows grow longer, and it is too dark to go; and the darkness of death deepens, and then it is *too late* to go.

I say your individual responsibility as Christians, brought up in a Christian school, surrounded by Christian associations, is indefinitely great in the sight of Him Who looks down not on the profession but on the life, Who cares not for the worship of the lips but of the heart.

Remember this—he who knew not his Lord's will shall be beaten with few stripes, but he who knew his Lord's will, and did it not, shall be beaten with many

stripes. Not one jot in the sight of God does it avail you with indifference and yawnings to attend the service dedicated to God here and elsewhere. No, you are doubly in danger of eternal condemnation, for you insult God's majesty by pretending to serve Him with your lips while your hearts are far from Him.

Look into your hearts to-night as you kneel here. Ask yourselves, "Am I making excuses for not leading a Christian life, and why am I? Is it because I like to be at ease, and pass my life pleasantly?" God may answer to you, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."—"Or is it because I think it manly to treat religion lightly, and because I see others doing the same?" The voice of God speaks like a death-knell to your soul to-night: "For every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."—"Is it because I nourish some darling sin, some secret, fearful wrong-doing which I cannot withstand—temper, or swearing, or obscenity such as I would fain hide from the eyes of men?" Then return answer to yourself this night, "I am doing the devil's work, *therefore* it is that I cannot come to the supper of the great King." For I say it to you to-night, as I have said in times past, they that do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

But lastly, to the penitent sinner I speak. You say, "How can I, deep-dyed in iniquity, continually

sinning worse, even after I have determined in my soul and prayed to God that the temptation should pass from me—how can I, who have done foul and wicked and deadly things all my life—how can I, who feel sin so growing on me that I have become but an appendage of my evil passion, and am entirely engulfed by it—how can I find a place in God's forgiveness?"

Listen! the messenger of Christ—nay, the voice of Christ Himself coming down the ages as "tender as the morning dew on flowers," whispers lovingly to the sin-stricken and despairing soul, "And yet there is room."

## SERMON XII.

### David.

PREACHED AT BRADFIELD, FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, 1883.

"*Arise, anoint him: for this is he.*"—1 SAM. xvi. 12.

A MAGIC charm lingers round the life of the son of Jesse—a charm which is all its own. First, David is one of those few characters in the Bible which are presented to us as a historic whole; we gain an insight into a life from its beginning to its end, a life worked out and laid bare from the cradle to the grave. More often we find pictures of men of which only the outline is given us; the details and colouring are left for the imagination to supply. They come on to the stage in some one great act of their life's drama—as heroes, as martyrs, as prophets, as criminals. We gather much from the short enactment; but then they move off, the curtain falls, and it is left to us to imagine much that is done behind the scenes.

They thus, if I may so speak, represent characteristics rather than present characters; they serve as

types more than as models. Abraham is the type of obedience, Esau of impulse, Jacob of sharp-sighted thrift, Joseph of virtue triumphing over difficulties, Moses of meekness, Samson of baffled strength, Eli of moral weakness, Gideon of enthusiasm, Samuel of devotion, Saul of self-assertive disobedience.

Some of these, like Abraham, stand before us like the dome of some vast cathedral, overarching us in moral grandeur, whose dim heights we cannot climb and hardly trace; some, like Esau, or Samson, or Saul, are as products of the sculptor's chisel, carved out apart and alone in distinct and defiant strugglings; while some, like Joseph and Samuel, are portrayed in successive tableaux, around whose central figures sin and dangers in the background swarm and threaten. Yet all we can visibly see are the building, the sculpture, the painting; there is nothing more. The imagination hovers round them and clothes them with a history.

But David is to them as music stands to the sister arts, not one fact or group of facts, but a continuous life; it is an oratorio created and wrought out by a master-hand; the design does not break in on us at once. First the solitary air—the cadence rises and falls; then wild choruses of hate and tumult and alarm; anon, strange fugues and discords, followed by the minor tones of loneliness, sorrow, repining, and loss, till out of all these contrarieties emerges a fuller

and deeper harmony hurling itself at the last into a crash of praise. It is the history of a complete human life.

But the special interest with which the life of David is invested does not end here. It is not only its completeness but its poetic character which arrests the reader. It possesses all those elements of vicissitude and adventure which attract us even in fiction, but which when met with in real life fascinate and enthral.

The life of David is at once an epic and an idyl. The shepherd boy made favourite, warrior, statesman, poet, king—it is a transmutation which loses none of its attraction, nay, which gains immeasurably in intensity and power, when we remember that he was a man after God's own heart; it is a romance of real life which charms our childhood, lends wings of aspiration to our boyhood, gives strength to our manhood and solemnity to old age; and perhaps a more human interest is added to the story when we find that a life consecrated to God was not untouched by the human frailties which encompassed it, nay, was even embittered and poisoned by the breath of sin and shame.

Behold him, then, the shepherd boy, lying in the highlands of Bethlehem, gazing up at the stars, those nightly sentinels which kept solitary watch with him, and far beyond into the overarching canopy of blue infinitude in which those glowing worlds were set. What waking dreams can we imagine this lonely boy

to have dreamt; what floods of fancies poured over his soul! All had voices for him, and all spoke of God. "One day telleth another, and one night certifieth another. Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words into the ends of the world." And as the faint grey streak of morning broke upon the everlasting hills, he saw the sun come forth "like a bridegroom out of his chamber," making rainbows of the mountain-brooks, and scattering dowers of gold on the awakening earth. And, lonely in space but not in spirit, he dwelt with the great Creator, and learnt on those solitary uplands (we cannot doubt it) those spiritual impulses which quickened and deepened his after life.

When the prose of age creeps on us and levels us down into what we fondly call the realities of existence, when the narrow sphere of duty and routine has done its work in dulling and blunting our higher aspirations, we can scarce understand those sharp, free fancies which mark the soul fresh-minted from the treasury of God.

Reading once of the boyhood of one of our greatest thinkers, a story written by himself and of himself, I remember how he describes the glorious fancies which haunted his own early days; how that he was really a king, whose grandeur and title were, till he grew up, kept from him by ministers and servants, but that some day he was to enter on his inheritance,

and that meantime, by despising meannesses, and caring only for things great and good, he was to train himself worthily of his future station. A right royal thought, and one that may once have been David's own, as he communed alone with God and nature, and looked down from a spiritual pinnacle on the bustle and hum and petty turmoils of men below.

And a right royal lesson for us. Too soon does the dust of the highway of life choke the finer tissues of our being; too soon do the cares and sorrows of this world render dumb those voices of God which spoke so clear in the morning of life; too soon do sin and shame with the deadly contagion of their breath, do their deadly work, and disfigure the fair beauty of early innocence and high aspirations. Hold fast these twin gifts, of all God's gifts the best and most precious, the gift of holy aspirations and of inward purity, which God once bestowed on you as the blessings of childhood. With them, you are already kings of that fair kingdom which man can neither give nor take away; without them, dark and homeless, you are wandering far away from your heavenly home; without them, you need full sore that kindly light which can alone lead back the wanderer, with pained and bleeding footsteps, through crag and forest to the path from whence he strayed; without them, ye can only with hardness enter into the kingdom of God.

I have talked of David's childhood, and the limits that time and patience sets to my words admit of my dwelling on only some even of the great landmarks of David's after life. Those of us who have passed the bounds of childhood know by personal experience there are such landmarks in human life—times when outward circumstances, change of scene or fortune, sunshine or shadow, gain or loss, joy or mourning, modify sometimes, in spite of ourselves, the undercurrent of our being, and transfigure the aspect or change the bent of life. In David's life these landmarks are numerous, since he led what is called an essentially chequered existence. I pass over in silence then the anointing of David by Samuel, and his subsequent acquaintance with Saul, which forms the subject of our evening lesson, merely asking you to note that the knowledge of his future fortune seems to have left no evil impress on his character. Like all really great men, what was a surprise to others was none to himself.

We can generally, even among ourselves, in a much smaller way, know whether any one is a great man or a little one, by observing whether success intoxicates or solemnizes him, and we frame our judgment of him thus by a sort of instinctive process. To the great man success is not a surprise, nor a piece of luck thrown in his way, but the development of a new responsibility. Remember this as a wholesome

lesson for yourselves: if success makes you dogmatic, conceited, self-opinionated, condescending, you may be quite sure that you are not fit for it—that you are a little man; if power comes to you and you feel elation, and form a better opinion of yourself and of your own merits in consequence, you may suspect, and rightly suspect, that you will abuse your responsibilities.

But I hasten on to touch briefly on another aspect of David's life—his friendship with Jonathan.

"Pleasant hast thou been to me, my brother Jonathan: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." I call this a landmark, for it was the arousal of a new feeling; and if there is much of an epic in David's career, here, I think, we may venture to trace an idyllic touch. After a home existence in which he finds seemingly nothing but uncongenial society, unrecognized ideas, he starts as it were here into a new life; the spontaneous activities of a heart yearning for affection are suddenly wakened into being by the discovery of corresponding sympathies in another, and love burns with an intenser and purer flame, because hitherto it has been denied access and air.

Now, this is no new experience. There is no form of human suffering more common, more intense and refined and nameless in its agony, and more injurious to the moral fibre of the sufferer, than that of being

misunderstood; and as long as tact, that divine combination of head and heart in which all the virtues meet, remains a rare jewel in the world, as long as human sympathies are cramped in extent and warped in their expression, as long as men have coarse souls, so long will such suffering rank among the most tragic and yet common of earthly burdens.

But the mutual love of David and Jonathan was of that tender kind which defies analysis, but which rests on the only basis on which the highest love of any kind can ultimately depend—the almost passionate desire for each other's highest good.

And in these commercial days, when the great and holy name of friendship is dragged in the mire to express that mock-social intercourse which exists for mutual entertainments or convenience, and which at most extorts a regretful sigh or respectful expression over the fresh-dug grave, it is pleasant to turn back to those early days when hearts are fresh and hopeful, affections spontaneous and eager, to find there, if possible, a resemblance to those ties which joined in loving intercourse the hearts of the psalmist and his friend.

Cherish, then, the friendships of your school days as peculiar gifts which God has granted to you on whom the grip of the world and of worldly things has not yet fastened. Feelings gain perhaps in depth and force, but not in freshness or width of sympathy, as we grow

in years; and the seared heart of the man beats once again with renewed youth, the pulse is stirred again to the long-buried emotion, as he clasps again the hand of an early friend, and the tender memories of a day long dead wake into life at the sound of the well-nigh forgotten voice.

But what of evil friendships, those which exist between the bad and dissolute, between the black-souled boy and his as yet innocent companion—friendships founded on an evil basis, pursued with evil purpose, and carried out to a bitter and evil end? I see the serpent with head upreared ready to dart the envenomed fang into the heart of this school. I see, I have seen, unhallowed, deadly, viperous friendships; but I cannot allude to such, save to say that as the corruption of the best is ever the most degraded, so the highest impulses of heart which lift it heavenward can be transmuted into the foulest and most bestial instincts that can drag down a human soul to the lowest depths of hell.

One more scene in David's life and I have done. I pass over all the dangers from secret or open foe, all the wanderings amid the fastnesses and rocks of his future kingdom by the proscribed exile; I turn over the pages which mark him as a king, the death of Saul, the overthrow of rebellion, the assurance of his empire, till I pause at that chapter where, after his one great sin, God strikes him down, and he sits

by the body of his dead child, and utters that cry of resignation, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." David as a mourner. I do not ask you to regard the sorrow as the result of sin. As I have told you before from this place, suffering is not always, though it was in David's case, the result of sin; very often it stands quite apart, arising from causes utterly beyond our own control, and evidencing the mysterious ways in which God deals with the great human family whose destinies are hid in His eternal, all-seeing mind from the beginning of the world; and my thoughts have partly drifted into this channel by that strange, unparalleled calamity * which has lately carried hundreds of helpless children, in one fell moment, in the excitement of happiness, to that unknown country on whose shores the waves of eternity boom, so that we hear the voice of wailing, in its peculiar intensity, possibly unparalleled in our nation's history: "Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not." Truly death is not only the end; but even in the midst of life, and as I look out into the world, I see the same law—the living vivified by the dead, the decaying leaf fructifying the growing tree.

Yes, sometimes the shadow that waits for all men knocks at the door of a fair young life, as it did to David's dead child, and we must go, whether we be

* The disaster in Sunderland.

ready or unready. As we fall on our knees this night, let us pray God to make us ready, that when the summons comes, be it in the first or in the second watch, or in the third, it may find us waiting for the Master's call; and if so be that before us some one near and dear to us has been taken to his rest, we may cry with David, with a subdued voice of resignation, not a wailing of despair, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

# PART II.

## Miscellaneous Sermons.

## SERMON I.

### The Place of Wisdom.

PREACHED AT ST. PAUL'S, OLD CHARLTON, FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY, 1878.

"*The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.*"—JOB xxviii. 28.

THE twenty-eighth chapter of the Book of Job is perhaps the most remarkable in that remarkable book. We know little of its author—little beyond the bare facts which we can gather from internal evidence—but the story which it conveys is one that has made a profound impression on the readers of every age. A man seemingly in the prime of life, flushed with well-merited success, courted by friends, endeared to earth by every social and domestic tie which can make life worth living, is suddenly beaten to the ground by quickly succeeding strokes of fortune. There seems to be practically no breathing-time between the first act of this sad tragedy and the last; his wealth is destroyed, his children annihilated, his own body writhing with

an unbearable disease, all at one fell blow. And thus he sits down to meditate on the meaning of life.

It is this sudden change of fortune, this quick blasting of fairest hopes and seemingly successful endeavours, which has, I think, attracted the readers of the Bible most especially to the Book of Job; for it is a story which finds its analogue in every age, in every society, almost in every family. The strong man battling with adversity is a sight for gods and men.

"Man," says the author of this very book, "is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward."

It is, then, if I may so speak, the cosmopolitan character of adversity which has the power of attracting us with such strange fascination to the Book of Job. Other books of the Old Testament, especially the historical ones, are to many minds comparatively devoid of interest, because they profess to describe merely the fortunes of Hebraism—of a single race; but the Book of Job is never out of date, because trouble is the heritage of humanity.

There are, however, additional reasons for the popularity of the book. One is, that regarded merely as a literary composition, it is of a poetical merit which can defy criticism, or perhaps a parallel. The other, that man is here represented not merely as suffering, but as philosophic under suffering.

Without entering into any discussion of the former

question, let us consider more particularly the latter; namely, what form Job's philosophic sorrow takes in the chapter before us.

His friends have been questioning the statement whether God makes practically any difference in His treatment of the good and the evil, the just and the unjust. Here is a man who has all his days walked uprightly, who has at any rate been no notorious sinner, the sincerity of his life and character has seemed till lately to be recognized by his prosperous condition; and yet without any warning, and certainly without definite sin, he has by a divine fiat been plunged into a state of profoundest misery. It is in this mood that his friends address him. "Is it any pleasure to the Almighty," say they, "that thou art righteous? or is it gain to Him that thou makest thy ways perfect?"

"Curse God, and die," is the relief suggested to this state of inequality between desert and reward. But Job will not accept as his own this answer of a despairing soul. The language of fatalism has no charms for him, for he sees beyond the veil; but though he rises superior to the undeserved misfortunes which he suffers, he cannot sink the fact that they are undeserved. And thus the book is a record of a grand struggle between rebellion and resignation, a struggle which is finally decided in the chapter from which our text is taken.

And what is his final reply? No whimpering acquiescence in the inequality of God's actions; not even does it contain a reference to the hardship of his lot; his refuge from his own sorrow, as well as from the sceptical taunts of his friends, is found in the consolation of a divine philosophy: "Where shall wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding?"

He does not settle this question off-hand; he has no infallible nostrums which should guide him in the search. Does he hold that wisdom is to be found in the mere contemplation of the works of nature? This is the position of Pantheism. God, says the Pantheist, is only another name for wisdom; wisdom is manifested in the operations of nature. God has no existence apart from phenomena; His being depends only on the fact that we who are ourselves but fleeting forms of universal life *think* that He exists. We see Him in the sun, in the ocean, in the observed sequence of physical laws; but after all He is only a relative truth.—Does all this satisfy Job's search after wisdom? No; he cannot see that such a conception of wisdom as this will satisfy the cravings of a human soul. Let him give the answer in his own words: "Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. The depth saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me."

But yet we cannot overlook the fact that this wisdom, and this god of Pantheism, are ideas which often

assume shape in the teachings of philosophy and in the practical life of the present day. Nor, again, can this wisdom be found in the materialistic tendencies which form an increasing danger to our faith. The growth of scientific knowledge—a growth which has been remarkable in our own generation for its almost miraculous rapidity—has produced a twofold result, not only on those minds which are engaged in probing the secrets of nature, but also on those who are in any way influenced by the result of those researches —in other words, on the whole tone of modern society.

On the one hand, it has produced an immeasurably higher, more spiritual conception of God Himself in all His infinite relations to us, quite apart from what divine revelation teaches us of His abilities. There has resulted, if I may so speak without irreverence, a refinement of our ideas regarding the Divine Being, traceable almost entirely, I think, to the progress of scientific knowledge. We no longer regard God as the angry Being who strikes us with His lightnings, blasts our harvests, and casts our carcases on the rocks, stung into quick anger by the sins of unrepenting generations. We regard Him rather as the Divine Creator Who wills to work by general laws of order, and of Whom it may yet be said now with as much unquestioning simple faith as in the days of the prophet of Babylon, "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of

earth; and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?"

But yet, though the conception of the Deity is to the mind of strong imaginative grasp far more spiritual, far more unapproachable in its majesty than before; though the whole expanse of nature—that vast field in which the divine energy moves—is a picture the more constant, deep, minute, study of which brings to us fresh ever-deepening beauties undreamt of before; though this is so, yet there are minds on which the investigation into the deep things of God, the constant examination of secondary causes, acts as a numbing influence. "So long," says an eminent divine, "as a man is probing Nature, and is in the thick of its causes and operations, he is often too busy about his own inquiries to receive from them an impress of the absolute and awful majesty with which Nature's Lord is invested to the simpler, more unenquiring mind."

Yes, the unwisdom of these men lies in the fact that they cannot see beyond the veil; they can trace physical causes back step after step as separate items in the arrangement of a universe, but they can never face the true problem which meets them on the threshold of their inquiries, Who or what made these arrangements; what power gave them birth? They cannot see that there is a soul in nature which breathes through all its forms, and leads us up through all these secondary causes to the throne of God.

But let us turn again to the consideration of Job's meaning, and we may perhaps understand the answer to his question.

We have seen that it is not consistent with the pantheistic or materialistic theories. "The depth saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me."

More: it is not to be found by an intellectual process at all.

Two divergent theories of morality existed in the ante-Christian world. The one said, "Virtue is knowledge;" the other said, "Virtue is obedience."

The former theory was that which existed almost exclusively in the Western world, and was especially the heritage of Greece, the most intellectual nation of ancient times. The exponents of this system held that moral evil is to a large extent, if not altogether, due to ignorance: that knowledge is the one thing necessary for individual well-being. But there they stopped short. Their religion, overlaid by gross creations of deities, was entirely divorced from all questions of morality; they could only grasp half the truth; they saw the beauty and harmony of virtue, but could not connect it with any higher ideal than their own individual selves.

With the Jews the case was different. Favoured as they were with direct revelations of a personal God, they started with the belief that obedience to His laws

was the fitting expression of the moral life. They joined the exercise of virtue with the worship of a Supreme Being; to them, in the words of Job, "the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding."

The knowledge, then, meant here by Job, dimly recognized by the Jews, and practised by them in the earlier period of their history, is not a mere intellectual process; but knowledge in act, knowledge obtained by love and obedience, as distinct from intelligence.

Strong, however, as this feeling of the necessity of obedience was to the Jewish mind, it is a matter of history that this people eventually failed completely in the practical application of it to themselves. The constant strugglings of the spirit to become like the Infinite, the yearning for more light, which is the essential characteristic of the Book of Job, lost all force in the decay of the Jewish nation. The necessity for a more perfect revelation, which so much of the Old Testament writings shadow forth, was in reality not acceptable to the Jewish nation in its later days. Obedience had been succeeded by sacrificial ceremonials, a morality of the heart by a burdensome ritual, long before the coming of Christ.

This was the real cause of the rejection of the Saviour. "He came to His own, and His own received Him not." The same attitude of mind which substi-

tuted formalism for obedience sought for a temporal Sovereign instead of a spiritual Lord.

Let us apply, then, this text to the consideration of our own days. "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom." I think we may learn from this text to have larger charity, to have a larger conception of what true religion means, and to consider the minor differences which unhappily divide one sect from another as comparatively unimportant, when compared with the great unity which is the ground of our common faith. Do not let me be supposed to undervalue what we all hold so precious, the sacramental graces and the doctrinal truths which are the heritage of our Church. I refer rather to those external accessories of worship, which are liable to be modified by the customs of different societies, or by the temper of succeeding generations. These accessories may *imply*, but they do not *constitute*, wisdom. The stability of a Church, as of a nation, depends upon the moral condition of the individuals which compose it; but excessive formalism in worship stunts, if it does not check, their moral and religious growth. If we look to the example of Christ, we find that it was against this evil that He most constantly and uncompromisingly fought. The washing of pots and cups may have been a necessary item in the routine of the temple service; but if it be made, as with the Pharisees of old, the one thing needful, then pure religious aspira-

tions and simple worship of our Divine Master must be stripped of their greatest force.

Perhaps this formalism may take another shape, one, perhaps, more dangerous still—formalism in church-going, for example, and in public worship. It is a charge against the use of a set liturgy in our services that its tendency is to awaken few fresh ideas in the minds of the worshipper—to become a dead, mechanical routine. It is not the place here to point out the real advantages our Prayer-book possesses over extempore compositions; there is little doubt but that the benefits far more than counterbalance the objections. But if there is to be reality in our worship there must surely be intense concentration on the words we utter. Cabalistic repetitions of set formulæ cannot strengthen the moral and religious life.

But again, if by wisdom in our text be not meant mere intelligence, nor yet mere external formalism, so it is not altogether mere feeling. "There can be in the long run," says a great living writer, "no strong play of feeling apart from the sense of the intellectual truth of the object on which such feeling is bestowed." To lavish feeling, if it be possible to do so, on a personage who is suspected of being mythical or half mythical, is to degrade feeling. In other words, we must have a strong intellectual conviction that the Christ Whom we worship is the actual Man-God represented in the Gospels—the Messiah,

the Saviour of mankind. This is the one essential fact which we must accept with all undoubtedness. This is the fear of the Lord at which we must aim, if we are to practise any religion worthy of the name.

Further, let us notice that this fear of the Lord shadowed forth is inseparably connected with our moral life. "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." Here, again, is a striking anticipation of the teaching of Christ. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven."

It is one of the results of our busy life, so quickly changed in all its aspects by the increased means of communication, that most of us seem to have no time for anything but the routine of business occupations, and it has often struck me that the difference in characteristics between this generation and its predecessor would be found on analysis to be gigantic. There seems to be no time for continuous reflection, not merely on religious, but also on social and political topics. Events crowd on one another. Newspapers, books, political and social celebrities, push each other out of the way in lightning-like succession. Very noticeably is this the case in matters religious; there the cry of "no time" is most loudly heard. They are, indeed, sometimes jostled out of the way

altogether. It is a strange self-deception in the human mind that the morrow is the time to begin all such things, but we know to-morrow never really comes. If there is any one here who, believing in a future life and a system of divine rewards and punishments in that future life, has not yet, in the language of the text, "departed from evil," let him most of all remember that to-morrow is too late; let him remember too, that if the fear of the Lord is wisdom, to know, believe, and not to obey, is that which inflicts the most deep and lasting injury on our spiritual nature. "If any be a hearer of the Word," says St. James, "and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was."

"Habit is more than second nature, it is nature itself. By doing just things," says one moral teacher, "we become just, and when we are just we do just things;" and so of all the rest.

But there may be others in whose case idleness is the reason for want of thought on such important truths. To a confirmedly idle man or woman, it seems sometimes a mockery to urge the text, "to depart from evil, that is understanding." What good to talk of this to a woman whose fashion-book is her Bible, or to a man who is sated with admiration of his own clothes? See the man of fashion, the curled

and oiled lounger, with mincing gait and simpering look, sauntering through what he pleases to call his life! Would he understand you if you told him that there was still in him a fragment of the divine?

There is a quaint story by an ancient philosopher, who was considered rather wiser than most other people, in which he tries to point the difference between the man who contemplates the absolute good and those who feed on material phenomena. He pictured a vast cavern, whose gloom is made yet more visible by the flickering of a smouldering fire, and along whose scanty opening stretches a narrow pathway. With their backs to it, and fronting the opposite wall, are chained a row of men, captive from birth, bound so fast that they cannot stir a foot nor turn their heads. Along the pathway hurry passengers to and fro, but the captives cannot see them, have never seen them; they can only judge of them by watching their flitting shadows thrown by the flickering firelight against the cavern wall. These, says the philosopher, are like men who, in vain pursuit, embrace the shadowy phenomena of sense. But they who contemplate and delight in the absolute good, are like those same captives, with chains suddenly snapt asunder, escaping from the firelit cavern, and gazing on the true forms of their fellows made visible to them by the beams of the midday sun. It is an allegory almost Christian in its meaning.

We, perhaps, have been captives in the caves of sinfulness, and have fancied, forsooth, that we see things as they really are, whereas all that we have been gazing at are shadows of shadows; but Christ the Deliverer snaps the chain of guilt and sets us free, so that we can, if we are so minded, gaze without flinching on the Sun of Righteousness. Why should we again turn to the walls to stare at mere illusion?

If immortality be not a mere fiction of the brain, if it be indeed the heritage of our race, if we do not lose altogether our individual selves when we quit this world—if, as has been so well said, we are in the face of eternity like children gathering pebbles on the shore of the ocean—then let us put away this gross clinging to petty purposes and unworthy aims; let us rather take, not as our Sunday, but as our daily model, the life and actions of Him Who, though God, yet for us was man.

"The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding."

## SERMON II.

### The Great Harvest.

PREACHED AT WOOLWICH, EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, 1878.

'*The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.*"—JER. viii. 20.

THE difficulty that we all feel, even those who have most claim to be called sincere Christians, in carrying out those high resolves which we frame and too often break from day to day, as it is indeed one of the strongest considerations which make unbelievers shrink from practically accepting the truths of the Christian religion, arises, I think, from this: that its demands are unlimited, that its empire must be indisputable, that the allegiance which it requires is one which allows no swerving from the standard of its great Captain. It is the complete crucifying of the affections and lusts which makes the life of a perfect Christian seemingly unattainable and so rare. It is a hard life-long combat, this continual watching against the power of evil, this march through the world here below, even

though we be clad in heavenly armour. Often we feel inclined to throw down our weapons in despair, even though we must know that the enemy is ever near to find out the laggard and him that slumbers at his post.

And all this is true because our Christianity is no mere sentiment, if it be a Christianity worthy of the name. The life of Christ on earth was no sentiment, but a constant sacrifice to redeem mankind from the death which was the consequence of unforgiven sin. "God was in Christ," says St. Paul, "reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." And so it ought to be with us, if we would strive to imitate the Author and Finisher of our faith; no folding of the hands in passive acquiescence in the conditions of the world as we find them, but an intense purpose not only to render our own lives acceptable in the sight of God, but each in his own sphere to be trying to bring fresh souls into the fold of Christ by his example and teaching.

"Broken lights" though we be of the image of the Son of God, yet "work" must be our watchword to guide us in leading a Christ-like life.

But if the Christian religion is no mere sentiment, it is not either a mere code of moral practice. No mere morality is sufficient for Christ. "All these commandments," said the young man, "have I kept from my youth up." And what said Christ to him? "If thou

wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me." And again, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

The kingdom of God, then,—what do we mean by the kingdom of God? No outward visible kingdom was surely signified by our Saviour in these words: "Think not to say within yourselves, Lo here! or, lo there! for, lo! the kingdom of God is within you." Brethren, have we ever found the kingdom of God within ourselves? Have we ever felt the awful nature of the guilt which still reigns in the heart of every one of us? If not, then we are not saved. Have we ever felt the power of Christ working in our hearts, and casting out everything that defileth? If not, we are not saved. Have we ever felt that power and love which sometimes quite suddenly, more often after long and painful struggles, changes the whole world to us; which transforms, by the magic of Christian sympathy, the stranger whom we knew not into the brother in Christ? Have we learnt to forgive the enemy or rival, and to bear without repining the struggles which may be our daily lot? If not, oh! then we are not saved.

And if we have never felt the peace in the soul which comes from sins forgiven, then we have not felt what the kingdom of God really is; and if we have never known what the kingdom of God really is, then

what claims have we to call ourselves Christians? And if we are not followers of Christ, then there can but be one fearful answer to the question asked by our despairing souls—then we are not saved. "For," says St. Peter, "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

My brethren, the one great difficulty which is found by those who know it only too well in themselves as well as in others, is the tendency in the human mind to put off to-day what can be done to-morrow; and practical people will tell us that such a fault, if it occurs in the business of life, unfits a man for all success and enterprise. But this fault is especially noticeable in religious matters, and for two reasons: one is that the repenting of our past sins must bring much remorse, much bitterness, often much prolonged unhappiness in thinking of our past life; the other is that there seems to be no obvious beginning from which a religious change can be well dated. And thus men go on day after day putting off the evil day, until, on their death-bed, they find too late that they are "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."

And so it is often the practice, and I think a very laudable practice, whenever Advent Sunday or the New Year comes round, for preachers to urge on their hearers more especially then the necessity for re-

pentance, as being a fitting time for beginning a new spiritual life.

But I implore you, my dear brethren, this day, wait not for Advent or the New Year before you enter upon a Christian life, if there be any here who have till now turned a deaf ear to the words of warning. For even the strongest and youngest may never see another Advent or another year on this side the grave. The Shadow which waits for all men does not always first take those who are bowed with age and infirmity. Who does not know that he often wraps the youngest in the folds of his darkened shroud?

Repent ye, therefore, *now;* for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Yes, though this earth may last thousands of ages longer, yet for you, for me, for each one here, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

"Death is the end of life. Ah! why should life all labour be?" Why, then, in your headlong desire to slake the thirst for immediate enjoyments—enjoyments which turn to dust and ashes on the lips of those who taste them—do you so blindly hurry from one vanishing shape to another, like the midnight traveller lured from his path by the beckoning lights of the *ignis fatuus*, till at last he perishes in the ever-deepening morass?

Oh! brethren, believe me, the love of unworthy pleasures, the love of unholy thoughts, tricks of

money-getting, the love of unmerited praise, are not compatible with the love of Christ. The desire for sordid gain, for instance, must be abhorred by Him who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor. And yet this is a vice which at this time, and in this country especially, has taken large possession of people's souls. Do not think that the poor are more free from it than the rich. But Jesus Christ has said, "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

I put it plainly before you this morning. Choose now which you will have—the love of transient pleasures, or the eternal love of Christ. To-day decide for evil or for good, or, believe me, too soon you will have to utter that despairing cry which will be wrung from a soul which has spurned the means of salvation, and which knocks when the door has been shut: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are *not* saved."

But if we seek, yet we cannot *find* the kingdom of God without prayer. Prayer is the act by which man, conscious at once of his weakness and his immortality, puts himself into real connection with the Divine Being. As it has been the expression of the most degraded, so it must be the invariable continuous companion of the highest and most spiritual lives.

Brethren, do you ever pray? Not, I mean, in the

outward form, in the utterance of set formulæ, but with the heart, pouring out your whole soul's wants and anguish to One Who hears and will not turn away.

Oh! you who have not repented, pray for conversion this day; pray that this day a new spirit may arise in you, which shall make you cast away the works of darkness, and put upon you the armour of light. Look (now) unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of your faith.

And though at all times there is the necessity of prayer, it is yet chiefly when sorrow or adversity comes that we see and feel most keenly how indispensable is Jesus' help; then it is that we feel most deeply the reality of Christ's presence; He is then the only Solace for every sorrow, the Comfort of every despondency, the gleaming Beacon that guides the poor storm-shattered soul home to the haven where it would be. But if we do not believe *then* that Christ died and rose again for us, then indeed we are of all men most miserable; not then for us can we think there is any hope of seeing again our dear ones whom we have followed to their grave.

But if we seek to meet them in another world whom we cannot see again in this, surely our first interest as well as our first duty is to render ourselves worthy of a heavenly home.

If I dare take a glimpse of that other life where

all is joy and peace, I could imagine that if any touch of sadness could mar their happiness who dwell in those blest abodes, it would be the knowledge that they whom once they loved on earth would never taste with them the fruition of eternal light.

To all such aching hearts, who have lost some dear one here—and surely there are but few who have not felt sorrow such as this—I appeal this morning, and say that hallowed thoughts like these ought to draw us nearer to the throne of God.

Are you selfish and self-indulgent? Struggle by the help of Christ, by abnegation of self, to help to save the souls of others. Struggle by the help of Christ to renounce those pleasures which, innocent enough in themselves, may yet in your case have a tendency to entrance your nature and enslave your soul.

Medicines are not given to the whole, but to the sick.

Are you passionate? Think on Him "Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not."

Are you, by reason of levity as regards all serious subjects, or of your naturally joyous disposition, indisposed to appreciate the sinfulness of sin, inclined to forget its consequences on your own nature and that of others? Try to live more with the thought that Christ is watching—Christ is watching your life and its shortcomings. "Remember," as a great writer

has said, "Christianity has not invented sin; it has only deepened the sense of its sinfulness."

"I see and approve of the better course," says the heathen poet; "I follow the worse."

"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this," says the apostle, "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world;" and Christ, in those immortal sentences, which have never lost a tithe of their deep significance for the last nineteen hundred years, declared, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

Then pray God that, with these thoughts before us, with the blessings of God's mercy upon our lives from this time forth, we may on our death-bed, whether it be far or whether it be near, even at the doors, never have occasion to cry with the prophet of the captivity, "We are not saved."

What more fitting time, my brethren, than to begin the good work now? What said Christ? "Say not ye, There are four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." If there is any season which suggests to us the sacred feeling of hope, hope for our bodily and our spiritual wants, it is the season of harvest. It seems to remind us of that great world-covenant, which after the flood God made with man, that the waters of Noah should

no more go over the earth, that seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, should never cease. And, again, the harvest-fields serve to remind us of the common bond and sympathy which associate the most distant time and remotest nations in one common brotherhood. "They make of the earth one great home; of the human race, one great family; and of God, the universal Parent to Whom day after day we may go with filial faith and love."

These harvest services have another aspect. They ought to fill us with deep heartfelt thankfulness, for they are a full answer to the prayer which we daily offer at the throne of God: "Give us this day our daily bread."

Even now, alas! as I speak, thousands of human beings under another sun are suffering the extremities of bodily torture, starving by slow degrees in the scorching wastes of India. It is scarcely possible for us to realize the awful character of a calamity like this, when starving multitudes sit down to die in all the slow calm agony entailed by disease and protracted want.

But if we can do scarcely anything to relieve distress like this, may it make us, at any rate, more conscious that we are ever dependent on the mercy of a Divine Power; and when we go on our knees this day, may we pray to Him to defend us and all our dear ones from such a scourge as this.

And, lastly, these services remind us of another great harvest-time, when the work of all will be made manifest, when the great Reaper shall gather the sheaves into His garner. "The harvest is the end of the world."

Oh! brethren, as we all stand now in the sight of Almighty God in His church to-day, and as we must hereafter stand together at His awful bar, to be judged of the deeds done in the body, I call on you once again, if any there be who came here this morning with unrepentant hearts, turn, turn to the right way before it is too late! "The night cometh, when no man can work." Repent, every one of you. Think of those dear ones who have gone before you—parents, brother, sister, child, or friend. For your own eternal salvation, return this day to the Lord with humility and prayer, that so, when you are called away from this earthly scene, when for you at last the harvest is past, the summer is ended, you may be found, with all you love, standing at the right hand of the Lamb, Who will utter again those precious words, so sweet to the souls of those whom He has saved, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

## SERMON III.

### Tidings of Joy.

SHORT ADDRESS DELIVERED AT ST. JUDE'S, SOUTH KENSINGTON, CHRISTMAS EVE, 1878.

"*Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy.*"—LUKE ii. 10.

THERE is one characteristic of Christmas-time which I think is lacking in every other festival season, and it is this, that there seems a natural mingling of what I may call material and spiritual joy. It is the one season which Puritanism has been unsuccessful in robbing of its innocent pleasures. The tendency in our own time, indeed, is to pamper the material, at the expense of the spiritual.

Such a service as we are listening to may help us to feel that, after all, there is a great deal more in Christmas-time than mere eating and drinking. It tells us that the God Whom we worship is not an unapproachable deity, careless of mankind, but a Man Who could suffer, as well as a God Who could save. It reminds us that the gulf between heaven and earth was bridged over once for all by the love of God to a fallen world; that the whole creation, which

groaned and travailed in pain together, was set free by mighty, redemptive sacrifice, the sacrifice of a God putting on the pains of flesh.

Yes, the redemptive love of Christ began from His very birth. The first cry which broke the stillness in the manger of Bethlehem was the first prayer offered up in His mediatorial office by the God-Man, Christ Jesus.

"Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy." Yes, but it is a joy which is shaded by sorrow.

Have the scales fallen from our eyes during the past year, or shall we never possess our souls wholly before we die? Born into life, we are redeemed by Christ's love, but are we new creatures? Born into life as Christ, but with wishes, ambitions, love, how different, do we pursue our midday journey now, from those with which we first stepped out, fronting the dawn! Born into life, how we stultify our highest aims, our best desires! Born into life, we cry for bliss, as if we had more right than others, with the same sad hopes never to be realized! Yes, we have no right to happiness, unless it be with Christ. And we too often struggle on, thinking that now, and now, and now, happiness is within our grasp, but we only clutch handfuls of unpursued desires.

"Riches we wish to get,
Yet remain spendthrifts still;
We would have health, and yet
Still use our bodies ill.
Bafflers of our own prayers from youth to life's last scene.

"We would have inward peace,
Yet will not look within;
We would have miseries cease,
Yet will not cease from sin.
We want all pleasant ends, but will use no harsh means.

"We do not what we ought,
What we ought not we do,
And lean upon the thought
That chance will bring us through.
But our own acts for good or ill are mightier powers."

Yes, we ruin ourselves in vain endeavours.

Oh, wayworn brothers! tell me how many there be left that set out with you in the morn of life? Sadly you answer, "We bring only ourselves; we lost sight of the rest in the storm." Are you alone? Oh, brother! there standeth One beside you still; when you fain would drop down and die, He holds you up in His everlasting arms.

What think you of Christ? Are you waving Him away and keeping your own solitude? Can *you* refuse Him now? And yet the shepherds, lying in the night by their flocks in the starlit waste, refused Him not!

What think you of Christ? You who spend your best energies in a ceaseless worship of the god of greed, what think you of Christ? Will you refuse Him too? Those Eastern traders did not so, when they poured out the costliest of their treasures before the feet of the new-born Saviour.

What think you of Christ, cynical man of the

world? Are you ashamed of the gospel of Christ? If the Cross offends you, can you believe the cradle? If the Atonement be too hard a doctrine, can the Incarnation find acceptance in your hearts?

"Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy." Receive them now; it is the birthday of your Lord. The old year lies a-dying; before the young year comes, ask for the divine gift which requires nothing before its bestowal but a believing heart.

Behold, O Christian! this babe is the most wise God, in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, Who is both the Word and Wisdom of the Father! He is the mighty God, before Whose power the mightiest conqueror is but a broken reed! He is the immortal God, Who has neither beginning nor end of days, before Whom the angels veil their faces, Whose praise is eternal in the heavens!

Ah, what is man, that Thou, O God, art mindful of him? Our days are a shadow; we disquiet ourselves in vain, and we heap up riches and cannot tell who shall gather them. To-night put aside for a little this wish to sell your soul for sordid gain, a puff of vain-glory, some base pleasure, and lean on Him Who, though God, yet for our sakes became man, a little child in the manger of Bethlehem—"Emmanuel, God with us."

## SERMON IV.

### The Living Sacrifice.

PREACHED AT HAWKSHEAD, WESTMORELAND, FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY, 1878.

"*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*"—ROM. xii. 1. (*From the Epistle for the day.*)

PERHAPS, if there is one thing more than another in which Christianity stands unique among the religions of the world, it is this, that it is so essentially practical.

If you turn over the pages of the New Testament, you will hardly find a verse which might not have a bearing on our relations towards others, or on our inner religious development; or, to put it in another way, if we are in doubt how to act in any particular circumstance, we should hardly fail to find in the pages of the Bible some suggestion which might guide us in the course we ought to pursue.

And the reason, humanly speaking, why hardly any other religion has had much influence in the shaping of the world's destinies is mainly this, that

none of them fulfilled that requirement—they were not practical. Sometimes they were merely the creation of poetical minds; such was the nature-worship of the old Western world. The worshipper, when he looked up into the cloudless sky, thought that he was gazing into the blue eye of his favourite goddess; when he saw the clouds rolling along, he imagined they were the flocks which the King of Heaven was driving through his vast domain. But what bearing could these fancies have, beautiful as they were, on the inner life of the worshipper, or on his duties to others?

Sometimes, again, these religions have been produced by superstitious fears of brute force and physical strength; such was the animal worship of the East.

Sometimes, again, they have been the expression of a few high minds who, knowing nothing of a revealed Creator, yet felt the need of religious enthusiasm, and withdrew themselves from their fellow-men to lead a life of solitary contemplation of the Divine Being.

But all these had little influence on the world at large, because they lacked this practical element; they could say nothing regarding the daily life of individuals, they could say nothing of the rules which guide a man in dealing with his fellows. In other words, in these systems there was no connection between morality and religion; the worshipper had no personal ideal on which to frame his life; he had no Christ.

Nay, more; there was often open war between the religious and the highest moral life. One of the greatest men who ever blessed this earth with his presence before the Christian era, whose whole life was spent in the struggle for the attainment of truth, who spurned sin with almost Christian insight, as utterly destructive of the best energies which man possesses, whose worship of all that was good and beautiful and holy engrossed his every thought, and prompted his every motive, who felt indeed that virtue was the highest good, this man fell a victim to the cause of morality, was branded as an atheist, an insulter of his country's gods, of the old blind forces of nature, and was murdered by his countrymen whom he had been struggling to call to a higher life, a purer, more spiritual religion. And he failed because, with all his high and pure philosophy, he had no Christ to whom to point as the bright Exemplar of human perfection; he had no light wherewith to lighten the Gentiles.

But God be thanked that the old uncertain struggle between religion and morality has faded away.

The little manger at Bethlehem nineteen centuries ago gave us at once a God to worship, and a man by whom to frame our daily lives. The link between heaven and earth was never really joined till Christ was born; then was spanned the mysterious gulf between the finite and the Infinite never bridged over

before; then, and not till then, had Jew and Gentile alike the privilege of gathering from the lips of the Son of God Himself the teachings which should be at once a guidance for their lives and a fit heritage for eternity.

But if we have privileges and opportunities never accorded to those on whom the light of Christ had never shone, so we have awful corresponding responsibilities.

These responsibilities are summed up in the verse which I have chosen for my text. Hear it once more: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

Yes, it seems at first sight a hard saying, this continuous, lifelong renunciation of the whole man to the cause of Christ—nothing more nor less. And yet the words are so simple that the meaning can be none other than this.

To have a knowledge of Christ—that is, to understand that He was born into the world to save sinners from sin and all its evils—to understand that He was tempted, that He laboured, fasted, wept, and died for us,—to understand all this, and yet to act as if He never existed, is to crucify the Son of God afresh.

And yet those who do not give up all and follow Him, who do not act with the banner of Christ continually

before their eyes to guide them in the royal road which He has trod, and to lead them away from sin, are daily adding fresh thorns to the cruel crown, are daily filling up the measure of the agony endured for sinners' sakes on the cross of Calvary.

Consider, then, for a while St. Paul's meaning when he speaks of offering our bodies to God as our reasonable service.

First of all he means that our religion must be real.

What spiritual advantage is there in going Sunday after Sunday to our church, and repeating strings of prayers—however beautiful they may be—if these prayers make not the slightest difference in our daily actions and conversation with our fellow-men; still less, if the words which we repeat not only do not influence our own lives, but do not even convey to us any definite idea when we do repeat them?

Yet can it be denied that many of us—some perhaps in this congregation—come into the house of God and repeat their prayers as if they were mere vain repetitions to a heathen god, to be got over and done with as soon as possible, and treat the service as little better than mumbling incantations to a manufactured idol?

It is bitter mockery to our dear Redeemer and Lord if we can pretend to believe that He suffered for the eternal salvation of us all, and yet presume to offer to Him the very dregs of devotion in lives which owe their present and future happiness to His unfathom-

able love. Shame on the man who will act a living lie like this! Let him, if he will, renounce his barren, speculative belief in Christianity—he will be an honest man, at any rate, to have the courage of his convictions—and tear himself away from the beliefs (or prejudices, as he may term them) in which he has been brought up; but to be an insincere Christian, to laugh inwardly at the morality of a religion in which he professes to believe, to be ashamed to join in the services of his Church, and yet to attend them because it is the fashion and a gauge of respectability, is the act of a man who lies to his own soul, and is a coward to his own conscience.

Yet there are comparatively few, one may say, who do not join heartily in the service they attend, and go away with better principles and higher resolves.

Yes; but are there so many who act out these resolves?

It is not enough to have a sentimental regard for Christianity. It is not enough to worship the ideal, if you do not imitate the Man. There is no mysterious efficacy in calling on the name of Christ, if the name is a mere sound to you, and nothing else. Listen to the words of the great Master Himself: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven."

Do not think that Christianity is a thing to be put

off with our Sunday clothes. Does it not rather enter into every incident of our daily and hourly life?

This is what I mean by Christianity being practical. Most other religious systems recognize the existence of moral evil; Christianity alone supplies what no other system can supply—a remedy for this evil. By the death of Christ on the accursed tree has a remedy been found for the sins of the whole world.

Take care then, lest, knowing as you do what it cost to redeem your souls, you sin yet more and grieve the Holy Spirit of God.

And first, see that in all you say or do you recognize the full value of the life that has been given to you. Remember that no life is worth anything unless it has a purpose.

Perhaps it may be the lot of few here to afford to spend what is called an idle life. Let me remind all who envy those who do, that no lives can be half so unhappy as these. Idleness is, perhaps, the most detestable form of vice—the avenue for every other sin that flaunts in the midst of a luxurious and civilized society.

But I speak to those whose daily life is one of toil with head or hands. Christ Himself has taught us the true dignity of labour. From the time He was found in the temple, to the last dread agony on Calvary, He never ceased to toil for humanity—past, present, and to be. Let our labour, then, be for others

too, and let us not think any work so trivial, any duty so insignificant, but that it can be made the occasion of a lesson that may lead an unrepenting brother or sister to the feet of Christ.

Little can any of us know of the immense effect that the character of a man of high fixed moral purpose and single intense aim can produce on those among whom he lives. He may be poor, he may be insignificant, his sphere of action may be limited, but yet the eternal trickling of the drop has power to hollow out the hardest rock; and his influence for good circles far beyond his village or his town, and bears fruit beyond the grave. I myself have seen men like this—men whose fixed, unalterable purpose for good at school, at college, in the world, has set them like landmarks in a barren waste, by which other weaker brethren may guide their faltering footsteps home.

"Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;—

"Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's troubled main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, may take heart again.

"Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labour and to wait."

Yes, above all things, let us beware that we do not make our religious purpose a talent to be wrapt up in a napkin.

In these days, when Christianity is made a theme of discussion by scientific men, when its merits are bandied about in the lecture-room, or submitted to the test of modern criticism, we are often told that Christianity is selfish, because it puts forward as the end to be gained the saving of our own individual souls. But I have not so learned Christ; this surely is not the religion which Jesus taught. The salvation which we ought to have ever before our eyes is that of others, not our own merely. Remember, then, that not a single one among us is too young or too insignificant to have unmeasurable influence for good or ill on the lives of others.

Let the treasure at which your purpose aims be fixed in heaven. All other purposes are like the mirage one sees in some Eastern land. There, beneath the blinding glare of the tropical sun, men think they see ever before them a huge, rippling sea, stretching out for miles and miles in front. As they advance, the sea is still as far off as ever; it is only the sand of the great desert blinking beneath the noonday heat. So is the deceit of unworthy aims. We catch at them, and they bring nothing but gall and bitterness; the fragrance that we hoped for is not there. And so we go on, grasping at shadows, and missing the eternal truths.

But again, if we are to enlist beneath the banner of Christ, we must ever speak the truth in all singleness and uprightness of heart. Can there be anything more hideous to Almighty God than to hear the lips of His children utter the language of devils; for are we not told that the devil is the father of lies?

Let me not be misunderstood. Few of us, perhaps, are capable of a direct lie, knowing as we do that we are in the sight of Almighty God. But is exaggeration so rare among us? Does not our conscience convict us too often of clothing and painting the naked truth, for the sake perhaps of making a good story, and raising amusement or wonder in the minds of an admiring audience? And is this the sort of character which Christ would approve, Who silenced the pretensions of the boasting Pharisees? Is this the temper which the Holy Spirit loves, by Whose dread wrath Ananias met his awful death?

Once more, can blasphemy any more sully the lips of any here who claim to be the children of God? Can He Who gave us His divine command, "Swear not at all," look with anything but fearful anger on those who take His name in vain? Is it fit recompense, think you, to Him Who lived that we might not die eternally, Who died that we might ever live with Him, to couple His name—that name at which every knee should bow—with drunken revellings; or even to profane it by adjuring Him to

witness if we lie, because, forsooth, we fear that others will not believe our unvarnished word?

Or can a want of charity be compatible with an earnest Christian life? Most of all in matters of religion ought we to take to heart the divine principle of charity. Because our neighbours may have different ideas of religious worship, different opinions on religious questions, different beliefs on religious truths, we have no right and no reason to suppose that they have necessarily lower aims, or are destined to lower grades of eternal happiness, than ourselves. Remember what Jesus Himself has told us: "In My Father's house are many mansions." Difference of circumstance, difference of education, difference of mind, may make others tread a different road to ourselves; we may well hold fast to the eternal truths which we have been taught, and yet not deny the prospect of eternal salvation to those who press onwards in other company to the gates of heaven.

And once more, brothers and sisters, if we would really present our bodies a lively sacrifice unto God, we have all most need of prayer. Prayer, indeed, is co-extensive with the idea of religion itself; it is its very essence. Why have we need of prayer? Why, but because it is the natural expression of a human heart to pour out its wants and longings to a Higher Being? We cannot imagine a world without prayer. Even the savage prays to his fetish, the

heathen to his sculptured god. There is no human heart so high but it feels this need. Not so long ago there lived a philosopher who denied Christianity, and denied the existence of God, and yet so felt the need of prayer that he prayed to the spirit of his dead wife. But why do we Christians feel the need of prayer? It is because we feel the need of Christ.

Have you never felt the need of Christ? Ah, then! it is because you have never known sorrow.

Have you ever bent over the bedside of a dying child, whose bright career you have looked forward to with enthusiastic hopes that he would be an honour to his home? Have you felt this, or any sorrow like this, and yet never felt the need of Christ?

As you sit here in this church to-day, do you not see vacant places by your sides, where well-remembered, well-beloved forms once sat? Ah! believe me, truth is never felt so much to be truth as when it is shaded by sorrow.

Pray, then, in memory of those dear ones, as you fall on your knees to-day, to be brought nearer to the love of Christ. What more awful agony than this—that those whom we loved so dearly here, should, when they have reached their heavenly home, be forced to turn away their eyes from us because we have been unworthy to obtain a share in their immortal bliss?

Come, then, to Jesus now, if you have never felt the

need of Him before. "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." To-morrow—to-morrow is too late. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call on Him while He is near." He is here now in this very church, asking you to come. To you, to you it is that He is holding out His everlasting arms; and do you refuse His proffered aid? Do not shrink back at His loving call. Listen to his words, spoken now as He spake them nineteen centuries ago—

"Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me: for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

Before you leave the church, pray; pray for this rest for your souls, and the souls of those you love.

Present your bodies now a lively sacrifice unto Him; direct your life by no unworthy aims, but by the sacred purpose of a Christian life and the sacrifice of prayerful hearts; that so, when the evening of your life is nearing, when the shadows grow longer and longer on the path of your earthly pilgrimage, you may see that you are coming close to the everlasting hills, and that you may hear the voice of your dear Master from out the gathering gloom breathe these accents to the loving benighted and stricken soul—

"Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

## SERMON V.

### The Panoply of Faith.

PREACHED AT LOUTH PARISH CHURCH, FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, 1878, TO THE VOLUNTEERS.

"*Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*"—EPH. vi. 13.

"*Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*"—2 TIM. ii. 3.

NOTHING perhaps strikes the thoughtful reader of the Bible, and of the early history of the Church, more than the enormous difference in the relations which then subsisted between Christianity and the heathen world, and those in which Christianity stands to society now. In its beginnings it was a system which had to defy the highly organized forces of paganism and philosophy. It depended for its very existence on the untiring zeal of its devotees, on the single-hearted energy of those who freely offered their lives to the propagation of its great truths, and too often sacrificed them in the cause of their Divine Master. It was for ever struggling against principalities and powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places. The early

Christian pursued the worship of his God under all the disadvantages and dangers attendant on a proscribed religion. The catacombs of Rome and elsewhere are still among us, living records of the struggle of Christian worshippers against the utter extinction of their faith. Extermination was carried on uninterruptedly with fire and sword under the imperial edicts of the Cæsars. Nor was this policy a mere pandering to popular prejudices; it was pursued under the specious reasoning that the code of Christianity taught defiance to princes and abhorrence of the predominating religion; that its devotees were men whose pernicious tenets threatened the revolution of society, and the overthrow of the empire itself; that the followers of Christ were merely carrying out the dictates of a communist and popular agitator, who met his death by the just sentence of an order-loving tribunal. The most thoughtful and intellectual of the early Pagan writers agreed in stigmatizing the growing creed in terms of equal severity. It was denounced by one as a pernicious superstition. "Christians," says another, "a set of men of a new and mischievous religion." It was the exclusiveness of the creed, the all-absorbing claims on its disciples, that threatened its very existence, and made its propagation doubly difficult. The position of Christianity in the dawn of the faith required special characteristics in its supporters. There could be no half-heartedness or lukewarmness

about them. They were denounced by people and politicians, princes and philosophers, alike. The timid, the vacillating, the time-serving, were not, therefore, likely to swell the ranks of its worshippers. It required the devotion of lives too often consecrated by the crown of martyrdom.

And so I think it was mainly this condition of things which, from the Bible onwards, characterized the language in which it has propounded its truths and enforced its teachings. These have, if I may so speak, always a military colour about them. The life of a Christian is constantly regarded as the good fight of faith. "Let us," says St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, "let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." And in the Epistle to the Ephesians, from which I have chosen my text, he says, "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."

It gained, I repeat, its colouring from the persecution it was even then suffering at the hands of

the Gentile world, no less than from the real struggle in which it was engaged against the subtler internal foes that warred with the soul of the believer.

But now, what of Christianity in these latter days? Cast your eyes round and see what a different standpoint it holds in the eyes of the world, from when in those early days its tenets were taught and received in the rocks and holes of the earth. Its relation to the world at large is entirely changed. Through the vista of intervening centuries we see that it has been by far the most powerful factor in modifying the destinies of nations and individuals.

Gradually but surely, as our Lord prophesied in His parable of the mustard tree, we see how it has grown from the tender seedling planted in the villages of Judæa and Galilee, how it has taken root and covered the face of all the earth. There is hardly a spot in this world of ours which has not heard the sound of the gospel-trump, conveying the tidings of free salvation to the ears of those who will but receive it. The Bible has become the treasure of the South Sea islander no less than the heritage of our English homes. The Indian has read it in his wigwam, the trader on his hunting-trail, the Arab in his caravan, the sailor in the turmoil of the storm, the soldier in the tented field. The voice of the preacher is heard proclaiming the gospel of peace in the little beacon chapel, against whose weather-beaten headland the

ocean ceaselessly thunders, no less than in the dim aisles of some vast cathedral through which the organ peals.

Yes, it is the voice of Christ that speaks everywhere; but oh, how changed! It was small and feeble once; it is sonorous and universal now. It was defensive once; it is aggressive now.

Has, then, this martial language with which the gospel abounds no meaning in these days of ours? Is it to us a mere survival of Oriental metaphor, this perpetual call to duty and warfare for the cause of Christ? Does the Gospel trump give for us *now* an uncertain sound? Is the *Church Militant* an unelastic phrase of forgotten meaning?

I seem to think, my friends, there is a saddened tone of twofold meaning in the utterances of Holy Writ. I turn over the pages of the Bible, and I hear the prophet crying, "He shall judge among many nations, and rebuke strong nations afar off, and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." And then I turn to our Lord's words, and find something far different: "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and ye shall hear of wars, and rumours of wars. See that ye be not troubled, for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." There is little hope of peace there.

I hear the angel-voices crying on the eve of the Saviour's birth, "Peace on earth, and good-will towards men." And yet again, I hear the warning of Christ Himself: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword."

Ah! see the difference here—the utter contradiction of the two aspects of Gospel history, seemingly incapable of reconciliation, seemingly incapable, both of them, of truth.

Yes, but the difference, the contradiction, lies in the heart of man.

Open the pages of religious history, annals ever darkened with indelible stains of blood. What battles more bloody, what cruelty more barbarous, what passions more unyielding and ferocious, than those disclosed in the religious war, waged, forsooth, for the honour of Christ and His Church?

I need name but the Crusades, the martyrs of the Reformation, the murders of the Huguenots, to conjure up before your mind ideas of terrors so hideous, massacres so horrid, that the reader shrinks back appalled at the awful depths of human depravity and human hate. And all this in the name of the Prince of peace, Himself the first Victim inscribed on the roll of martyred saints.

And is it to be ever thus? Must the warfare of sectarian ferocity ever be carried on with fleshly

weapons, with the fire and sword? No; the days of religious wars have, we fain would hope and believe, passed away for ever.

Two questions arise out of these thoughts which I will briefly glance at.

First, can we ever hope that if the spirit which prompted the religious warfare of the dark ages has passed away, so too, in some future time, wars in any sense, or for any cause, may become a thing of the past; that political jealousy will one day have no more power to embroil the nations of the earth than can now religious hate? Will mankind ever be of one mind and one heart in settling peaceably questions of political as well as of theological controversy? Before we answer the question, are we yet sure that even religious warfare is a thing of the past, a phantom laid low for ever? No, truly no! Look around, my brethren, at our fair England, and see our hundred and fifty religions, whose devotees too often snarl, cur-like, at each other's heels. Our weapons, it is true, do not kill the body; but our tongue, sharper than a two-edged sword, crushes the religious spirit of our unoffending neighbours.

Is it so long since we emancipated our Roman Catholics and our Jews? Religious liberty! religious charity! Wild chimera of an enthusiastic brain! I cannot but see that they are practically non-existent in this England of ours. Even our pulpits are made

the battle-fields; the very facings on our clerical uniform serve as the badge of party to mark the difference of friend or foe; and our war-cry is the shibboleth of our sect. The spirit of tyranny, of oppression, yea, of massacre, lurks within our ranks yet; still does spite, with stab more venomous because by custom less displayed, and less spent by honest blows, fasten on the devoted victim, and smite with fatal stealth. Public slander, private religious gossip, blast our character, our fortune, our religious aspirations, with subtle and quick destruction. And is life, which still they leave us, precious without these? Oh, brethren, the fire of religious tyranny smoulders yet; let us beware lest it may some day break out into open flame, and the temple of God, in our souls and in our land, be left a nameless ruin, a forgotten creed.

But can we hope that in some future time wars, for whatever cause, shall cease in all the world; that men shall one day beat their swords into ploughshares, their spears into pruning-hooks? Alas! I see nothing that can warrant the belief, even the hope.

"It is," as has been said by a great writer, "an extraordinary enigma to see those who are spiritually one with another, killing each other on an immense scale, by weapons and engines which have been long improved with a view to the highest success in destruction." But really the explanation is a very

simple one. It is merely this, that Christianity has from the first recognized the established fabric of national existence; that these nations have been separated off from each other by unmistakable limits before the entrance of Christianity on the scene at all; that patriotism is as much an unalterable fact of human nature as family affection. Some, indeed, there are, and have been, who would consider the existence of patriotism to be a sentiment only compatible with a barbarous state of society, obliterated by the Gospel teaching, just as in the same way there have been some who so considered family affection, and thought that a life of self-enforced solitary contemplation is the highest ideal to which humanity can aspire. But this violence done to natural law brings its own retribution; and those who would try to rob us of national sentiment and family affection become themselves stunted and one-sided in their religious growth.

"Patriotism, then, and the rights of nations exist as natural facts, and with these comes the settlement of national questions."

And in national questions there is unfortunately no higher power to which the contending parties can appeal, and which after judgment can enforce submission. *Individuals* who are at variance can appeal to a judge who has power to enforce his decision by an appeal to society; but in the case of nations no

such higher power exists, and war is the only and necessary alternative.

See, then, that Christianity does not condemn war; its sphere is outside of it; it merely protests against the motives which sometimes lead to it—ambition, greediness, tyranny.

Its existence is therefore justified by the circumstances of human society, and so is the action of those who help to sustain the national cause, if such cause is, as we must ever hope that ours is, the cause of truth and right. No; I say it with all sadness—as far as human eye can trace, as long as human conditions exist as they are, wars must come. It is only when the Prince of peace shall return, and the souls of the elect be gathered in, that a new era shall dawn on nations and individuals, and the universal empire of Christ shall hold sway over undivided hearts. Then shall there be no more Greek nor Jew, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ shall be all in all.

Secondly, can we ever hope for the day when Christian men and women will find no enemy to combat in their own souls, no secret sins to be purged of, no temptations to surmount, no evil to conquer? Again I answer sadly, from my experience and yours—never, till we pass the gates of death, and enter into realms beyond the grave. The last enemy we shall conquer will be death, but that will still have to come.

We cannot even in imagination reach a hand through time and foresee ambition cease from gnawing the heart, sensuality from bringing with it its inevitable career of suffering and woe, evil tempers from cankering the soul, hate and cruelty converted into principles of universal love. I cannot believe in a progress of humanity to ultimate perfection—that daydream of philosophers—slowly and surely moving up from sin to sinlessness; because I see that nations rise and fall, that civilization brings in its train vices more fearful, if more refined, than the crimes of outer barbarism; because I see that as wealth increases poverty increases too; that a population which prosperity brings, brings also a tendency to overstock the land, and so again induces poverty and crime; that though, in maturity of time, art may do much to satisfy our needs and control the forces of nature, yet it cannot divert bad impulses, or crush the first risings of evil in the human heart.

No, always as far as human eye can see, something will yet remain undone, and so we shall be still soldiers battling against the desires of the evil one, and ever on our guard lest he should catch us slumbering at our posts.

And so surely the Gospel language is no constrained metaphor of bygone circumstances even in these modern days of ours; it is the language which appeals most strongly, most vividly, to our real daily

life; it reminds us that the world is one great battle-field, that there is ever an enemy near at hand to fasten his envenomed darts in our souls, and that, if we would conquer in the fight, we must be clad in the armour which by Christ's aid alone can save our spiritual lives.

This, then, is the fact which I would impress on you this day, and which is the leading and most indispensable virtue of a soldier, wherever he may be—the virtue of *discipline*.

It has been said by foreigners, who perhaps see us in our real character more truly than we know ourselves, that our national characteristic is independence, a self-reliance which makes us as individuals take our own course in thought and action without sufficiently valuing the allegiance we owe to others. It is to this that they trace our bluntness of manner, the criticizing and self-sufficient spirit with which we regard the action of others, our political freedom, and finally the firm hold that Protestantism in its diverging forms has acquired over our land. And true it is, that when we look at the condition of our Church we see this spirit of independence only too painfully marked, and the idea of submission to authority laughed down and despised.

And when we see, on the one hand, how decisions are set at defiance, and how those who ought to be the pillars of the Church toy with forbidden trifles

of external adornment and sacerdotal anachronisms, seemingly revelling in the luxury of sinning against the law; and when, on the other hand, we see associations organized for the express purpose of playing the spy, and incriminating those who indulge too far in tasteful ceremonial, then we may fain fear that the institution which has such high work to do in saving souls, and yet occupies itself with such trivialities, is already tottering with premature decay. Truly the virtue of discipline is not here.

It is indeed a strange fact that the conduct which we inculcate in our daily domestic and individual lives finds no place in our conceptions of religious duties; that ecclesiastical morality is so different from that which we teach our children and practise in our homes. But yet this very lawlessness, this disposition to kick over the traces of a religious organization, has its counterpart in the moral life. If this is an age of shifting creeds and undisciplined religious emotions, it is also an age of easy virtue.

Just as the virtue of heroism is produced by the conditions of an unsettled, warlike, and barbarous community, so are high moral aims and noble impulses a reaction against the tendencies of an ignorant and brutish society. On the other hand, in this nineteenth century of ours, we are all on a dead level of mediocrity—dead indeed to faith, dead to enthusiasm, dead to everything but the sordid arrangements of a

life of dull routine. No heroes of great moral beauty have flashed meteor-like on the horizon of modern times. There are no giants in our days; we are all ground down to a level of doubtful respectability. "The individual withers, and the world is more and more."

And so the very spirit which Christianity tended to enforce, and did succeed in enforcing in its younger days, the spirit by which man ever struggles to become more and more like the Infinite, the never-ceasing approachment to the highest, most transcendental moral ideal, has lost its force, and we have become the humdrum idolaters of a spectral God.

Yes, rudderless, rudderless, we are drifting on an unknown sea, left without a pilot, for we have cast off the discipline of Christ.

See how our conceptions of goodness and honour and purity have been distorted by the mandates of modern society; see how we erect the golden idols of utility, of the progress of humanity, and what not, and fall down and worship these gilded futilities, these motionless abstractions, till we find that in our hour of adversity they will not help us; and then, as the savage treats his fetish, we fell with desecrating hand the aimless products of our imagination because they will not listen to our prayers.

And sometimes, when this worship of abstract nothingnesses has brought naught but dust and ashes

in its train, we turn to Christ, thinking, forsooth, that He will be content with a lukewarm devotion and a service of the lips, projecting our importunate prayers on the attention of a God in Whose goodness we only half believe, and of Whose very existence we presume to doubt. Oh, brethren! the curse of modern society is indifference and want of discipline in every department of our moral, social, and religious life. The forces that war against the cause of Christ in our hearts are none the less terrible, none the less real, because they are more subtle than those against which the early Christians fought. This is an age of deep unrest; old beliefs seem to totter before the onslaught of modern thought and modern doubt; and the unrest which has been spread abroad in the world has penetrated our individual lives.

Is it peace? we ask ourselves, as the King of Israel asked of Jehu—is it peace for us, when we can discuss the reasonableness or unreasonableness of our religious beliefs with comparative indifference; when we can with cool equanimity question the orders of the great Captain of our salvation, because, forsooth, they are not adapted to the exigencies of modern society and to our own convenience? Can we ever expect to conquer in the fight if we are rebellious under His discipline, and desert His colours because His orders seem too impolitic to obey?

Is it peace, men of the world, with you, who amass

riches and cannot tell who shall gather them; who turn so eagerly to the treadmill of business and professional routine, and yet grudge the scant offering of a single hour to the service of your God?

Is it peace with you, men of fashion, gilded butterflies of our modern age, who taste and cast away the pleasures which you expect the world to create anew for you every morning; feverishly grasping at the pleasure of the moment, and yet powerless to lay the fearful spectres of your past? What have you to do with peace?

Is it peace with you, men of science, who boast to have discovered the origin of life in the *débris* of the ocean; you, who have plunged so deeply into the investigation of secondary causes, that sometimes you find no time for the contemplation and worship of the Prime Cause of all things? We cry for more light, and you only give us darkness more intense; we cry for more complete evidence of a Divine Father, and you offer us instead the worship of natural laws which, "red in tooth and claw," shriek against the creed of universal love.

Oh, blind guides! you cry "peace, peace, when there is no peace." Truly you have taken away our God from us, and we cannot tell where you have laid Him.

But what of that man who, after perhaps years of honest doubt, has beaten out the true music of his creed, who believes not with lips only, but in his life,

in the goodness of his Saviour? Is it peace for him? Yes. The war has ended in his heart, his eyes are lifted from the world, and he sees clear the eternal glory of the heavens, and the image of his Saviour there. Firm of purpose, and strong in the might of God, he fights his way towards his heavenly home, secure in the strength of his devotion in the armour of his faith.

But yet sometimes, even with him, there comes a nameless sorrow before his eyes, which perhaps the early Christian never felt—a deep melancholy, which casts shadows on his upward path. Is it the reflex action of that spirit of wild unrest which stirs the outer world, and finds a half-expression in the Christian's heart; or does it come from that unsatisfied longing, which the noblest spirit always feels to help his fellows, who fail and falter in the storm of life, up to the city of God? He would not, will not, be saved alone. He labours not for himself; he fain would take his brothers with him. But some—so many!—will not come, and those perhaps whom he holds most dear are deafest to his call; and so, with melancholy steps, he climbs the onward path, most forgetful of himself, and most remembering those who will not heed.

And so for us all goes on the fight with evil, in our hearts and those of others.

Yes, the war which we seek to end, but which

through life in some form for ever rages, is the internal conflict with ourselves—the war of unbridled passions, of reckless ambitions, of unpurified desires; this is a struggle needing that heavenly armour with which the Christian is bidden to withstand the hot assault of evil, without which he is powerless to resist his spiritual foe. Only with death does it end; only in the grave is there victory for the faithful servant of the Lord.

## SERMON VI.

### The House of Many Mansions.

PREACHED AT ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH, LOUTH, NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, 1879.

"*And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.*"—LUKE xiii. 29.

IT is a point that has been rarely noticed, and still less realized, by students of theology, that the history of religion is a history of progressive science; and that just as, for instance, we are more capable of judging of the true nature of the earth's motion now than before the days of Galileo, so, too, we can perceive, in the past history of religion, the sequence of cause and effect inseparably bound together by their proper laws.

Nor is Christianity an exception to this rule. We can trace the marvellous rapidity of its extension as being due to the superhuman character of the morality which it inculcates, and we can see how, humanly speaking, the doctrines taught on the shores of Galilee, and among the hills of Judæa, naturally

developed into a system which crushed the imperial paganism of Rome, which tamed the Gothic conqueror into the higher rule of the Man-God, Christ Jesus, and which finally embraced in its grasp the whole of European society. We can see how it has survived all the political changes which have swept over the face of Europe for nineteen centuries; how it has assimilated to itself the peculiar characteristics of popular governments no less than tyrannies; how it has attached to itself the high as well as the low, and yet in itself has suffered no radical alteration of nature. And the reasons why, humanly speaking, it has not succumbed to the pressure of external forces are mainly these: one is that the object of its worship is a Person; the other, that the morality it inculcates is the highest conceivable.

I will very briefly touch on the first of these two causes, reserving most of my remarks for the second.

The object of its worship is a Person. I may perhaps show more clearly how necessary a personal ideal is to the religious sense of mankind if I glance at the opposite pole of belief. It may be possible for a man of high philosophical principle to frame his life on an attachment to a lofty abstract ideal. He may fix his mind on the idea of good, and so lead a blameless life, with high aspirations and unsullied motives. There is a religion in India which has attracted worshippers by this ideal. There the

Buddhist concentrates his whole being on a contemplation of the Infinite; he feeds his soul with reflections on an unseen divinity. But what is the effect? He has to separate himself from his kind. As part of his creed, he has to annihilate all emotions, to stifle all the affections, domestic and otherwise, which the ordinary man is accustomed to consider the natural results of a human life; he is wrapped up in himself; all his high and holy thoughts are to be reserved for himself alone; he becomes an anchorite, an individual without claims on the world. It is obvious that this religion has in itself no seeds of progress. Like its votary, it is ever at a standstill; it does not attract proselytes; it is meant for a caste; it is impossible for the world at large.

On the other hand, Christianity is essentially practical. It appeals to man as a social being; it gives as the object of worship a Person Who passed His life as a man among men, Who suffered, was tempted, lived, and died in a world whose resemblance to that of our own is near, if not exact. In Him the bridge between earth and heaven was for the first time spanned. It was God Who came down to us in the likeness of man. He is the Mediator, not only as reconciling His Father to us, but generally as the grand Uniting Principle of the human and divine nature.

All the great questions which tortured the human

mind with their insolubility before the coming of Christ were then solved. The existence of a future state, the divine system of rewards and punishments for good and evil committed here, were accounted for and explained. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men."

But, secondly, it was the ideal character of the morality which Christ taught which has secured its permanence, and by its passionate longing seized upon the world at large. And the whole code of morality which Christ and His followers taught may be summed up in the two watchwords, so to speak, of the Christian faith: love, or charity, and self-denial. These, if you examine them closely, are not distinct; they are merely the double aspect of the same teaching. Self-denial implies love, and love includes self-denial.

But in the early centuries of the Christian faith it was self-denial which formed its more prominent aspect, whereas charity, or love, finds comparatively but little place. The martyrs of the early centuries could endure the fire and flame, the cord and axe of their pagan persecutors, and yet could themselves find heart to condemn with eternal anathemas those who differed from them on what seem to us comparatively unimportant or unfathomable questions of dogmatic truths. Sometimes we find a man of blameless life and purity deposed from his office, or bar-

barously murdered by his orthodox colleagues, because he held doubtful views on the relations of the Father to the Son; and the question as to whether the Holy Ghost proceeded from the Father alone, had power to divide into two hostile camps the Churches of the East and West—so little was the lesson of love and charity learnt during long centuries of the Christian Church. It is in this that I mean Christianity has shown itself a religion of progress.

And yet, has the lesson of charity been so well learnt in our own day? Can it be said of us, in a tone different from its ironical meaning in the early days of the Christian Church, "See how these Christians love one another"? Of a truth, though we have progressed, I think, in this respect, yet we still have much to learn.

Though we may say, "If we had been in the days of our fathers we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets," yet do we not busy ourselves unduly with the religious distinctions which yet divide sect and sect, village and village, home and home? Will you believe me when I say that it is almost as much of an impossibility for one man or woman to think exactly alike on all religious subjects as it is for one to be exactly like another in every feature or every gesture?

You allow and perceive differences in every part of the mental and moral disposition, and yet you

marvel at the stupidity or depravity of those who diverge from you on religious topics. Truly we build the sepulchres of the prophets, even if we have not killed them.

> "'He saves the sheep, the goats he doth not save;'
> So rang Tertullian's sentence on the side
> Of that unpitying Phrygian sect which cried,
> 'Him can no fount of fresh forgiveness lave
> Who sins, once washed by the baptismal wave.'
> So spake the fierce Tertullian; but she sighed,
> The infant Church. Of love she felt the tide
> Stream on her from her Lord's yet recent grave,
> And then she smiled; and in the catacombs,
> With eyes suffused, but heart inspired, true,
> On those walls subterranean, where she hid
> Her head in ignominy, death, and tombs,
> She her Good Shepherd's hasty image drew,
> And on His shoulders, not a lamb, a kid."

And we, have we so learnt Christ; we, the heirs of all the ages; we, who have grappled and conquered the mysteries of natural phenomena;—shall we dare, in the eyes of an all-seeing God, to limit the resources of His boundless mercy to our own particular expression of religious worship? No, believe me, you will not find religion or charity exclusively in the distinctive colour of a vestment, or in the posture of a worshipper, or in the pretensions of a priesthood, which attempts, half unconsciously perhaps, to gain the powers which the feebleness of its intelligence denies to it, by brandishing the terrors of a tremendous Judge, and the necessity of constant sacerdotal absolution,

before the eyes of a weak, trembling, but God-fearing people.

Nor, on the other hand, will you find wisdom and charity exclusively in the studied neglect of all this; by gauging the intensity of religious devotion by the length of a people's services, or of the sermons of a minister, by pious ejaculations in the midst of ordinary conversation, where good taste denies, and true religion forbids, a place; you will not find it in the joyless severity that offers salvation only to a few, and portrays the Father of us all as the relentless Judge Who condemns us in a mass to eternal perdition.

Last of all, will you find this charity in the practical atheist? It has been the practice in pulpits, most unwisely, I think, to include all unbelief in one sweeping anathema. It is easy enough to speak glibly, *ex cathedra*, on the wickedness of modern scepticism; to point allusions; to inflame prejudices against what is undoubtedly a growing danger to our faith; but it is a course of procedure which has surely done more harm than good. In all charity, we must allow that there are some who have come to conclusions antagonistic to our faith—men of upright life, of pure intentions, men who in many cases devoted their lives to furthering the well-being of humanity, and yet who are not Christians. Let it be far from us to condemn such as these. If we pity them, let it be with no contemptuous pity; if we

want to be censorious, let us look to ourselves. But there is also the practical atheist—the fool who says in his heart, "There is no God." We all know the type. He struts about on his little stage, and professes to be the spectator of all time and existence; pretending, in an eclectic way, to cull whatever is æsthetic from all creeds, and being a professor of none; who looks down with an Olympian pity on those who believe, and is proud to be thought the worshipper of the Progress of Humanity. Will you find true wisdom or charity in this amateur Sadducee? No, least of all here; and not at all in any of these distortions of religious expression; for these are mere external excrescences, which have encrusted themselves, like the shells in the legend to the god of the sea, on our simple primitive beliefs, so that one can sometimes scarcely distinguish the fair form of the religion which Jesus taught. The life which Jesus led was no cut-and-dried system, to be squared with our own peculiar prejudices.

Was it prejudice, think you, that made Him choose as the scene of His labours the obscurity of a Nazarene village?

Was it prejudice that inspired Him with a lifelong passion to save to the uttermost all them that firmly seek Him?

Was it prejudice that attached to His side the Galilean fishermen, whose only genius lay in a

devoted adherence to His cause, and whose enthusiasm was not for party but for humanity?

Was it prejudice that impelled the Saviour of mankind to suffer on the cross for the sins of all, past, present, and to be, and to feel that mysterious agony when His heavenly Father seemed for a while to withdraw His face, and the concentrated sins of an unrepenting world tortured His spotless soul?

The life of Christ is an awful sarcasm on the paltry meanness of a professing Christian, if he can find time to see so clearly the beam in his brother's eye, and to think that to himself and to his own sect and party, whatever it may be, belongs alone the promise of eternal salvation; while he looks with perhaps a secret satisfaction, on his fellow-Christians, who are treading a different road from himself, as people to whom an entrance within the gates of heaven is eternally denied. Listen to the words of Christ Himself: "In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you." If half the eagerness that is displayed in detecting the differences of doctrines were employed in discovering their likeness, in reconciling creeds instead of inflaming prejudices, in satisfying spiritual needs instead of wrangling over symbolisms and decorations and millinery, which are comparatively so entirely trivial, then there would be, believe me, far less cause to complain

of the irreligion which is rampant in every class of society. No wonder irreligious men are not attracted to a religion when its votaries seem to be squabbling over the very alphabet of their faith.

But this spirit of divine charity, if it is often wanting in religious matters, is still more deficient in our daily intercourse with others. It would be absurd to insist that we should never discuss the character of others. Such discussions often act as salutary warnings against associating with the bad, the profligate, and the irreligious. But do we not too often make people, not things, the subject of our ordinary conversations, with results little flattering to their credit or our own kindliness of heart, making them, as it were, unconscious criminals before a tyrannous tribunal which sees only the defects, and none of the virtues, of the men it endeavours to decry? Eccentricity is counted as a crime, difference of taste is considered another name for vulgarity of disposition, peculiarity of behaviour is distorted into a suggestion of villainy, because, forsooth, our weak eyesight has no power of discrimination beyond its own puny horizon.

There must have been considerable irony in the words of one who has told us that we live in the best possible time, and the best of all possible countries. I look around, and what do I see in this boasted nineteenth century of ours? I see much freedom of

thought, but much irreligion; much wealth, but much misery; much light and much civilization, but much crime that would rival the worst days of the Roman empire. I see drunkenness, our national vice, rearing its head to heaven, disintegrating society, and leering at the early grave of its countless victims. I see its bastard brood—murder, red in tooth and claw, creeping in our midst, and sapping the very foundations of our national life. I hear men making outcry for more light, and teaching their children countless things which affect the comfort and happiness of their present life. But life itself and its inner mysteries they are content to leave a dreary blank, unexplained by resources of science and philosophy. I hear far more talk than ever about Christianizing the heathen, and bettering the moral condition of uncivilized communities, but I see them threatened with a Bible in one hand and a bayonet in the other.

I know and feel that the God of the nineteenth century is a very different thing from the God of the first; that primitive beliefs are being gradually trampled down beneath the iron heel of fashion; that our best professors seem to be quarrelling over the very groundwork of our faith, or still more often over insignificant points of doctrine; while the man of the world with approving condescension smiles on their puny wars.

Truly, "they have taken away my Lord from me, and I know not where they have laid Him."

But to turn for a moment to the other and brighter side of the picture. If, as I said at the beginning of my sermon, the history of religion is progressive, it is in Christianity that we must look for its chief development, and in nothing is its progress more evident than in the increasing self-denial and charity which mark the character of the true Christian. There are men now in the Christian Church who take little heed to the conflicting claims of sect and party, who act out the life of their great Master as far as human effort can approach the divine. There are men and women who spend their lives in watching over the sick-bed, in soothing the afflicted, speaking words of divine comfort to the dying soul, with unabated love for Christ and zeal for His holy cause. In their home circle they imitate their Saviour, change by divine alchemy the angry spirit into a spirit of love, and infuse the purity of their soul into those of others. Their lives are like the circles from a stone thrown at random in the water; the stone sinks to the bottom of the mighty sea; we see it no more; but still the ripples widen and widen until they touch the bounds of the everlasting shore. Just so is the influence of a Christ-like man. He may be poor, he may be insignificant, but though his life will soon be over, his holy influence spreads more and more, and

blessedly bedews with its heritage of goodness generations yet unborn.

And to all who love Him and keep His commandments, without distinction of sect or party, God will open the gate of heaven. I *will* not, I *can* not believe otherwise. When some would narrow the way of salvation to a sect of their own, I can only reply in the words of Mary, "You have taken away my Lord, and I know not where you have laid Him."

Yes, though Christ may never have been preached in their streets, nor the Gospel trump sounded on their shores, yet "in every nation they that fear Him and work righteousness are accepted with Him." A grand, consoling, truth! Well may our eyes flash with triumph, well may our souls kindle with the fire of generous sympathy, when we hear the voice of the Son of God, as fresh and living now as when on the shores of Galilee he taught the creed of Universal Love: "And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God."

## SERMON VII.

### Sons of God.

PREACHED AT ILFRACOMBE, FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER, 1882.

"*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.*"—1 JOHN iii. 2.

THIS verse of St. John treats, I think, of three ideas, mutually interconnected, and yet sufficiently distinct in meaning and application to be capable of being considered in consecutive order.

Let us consider it as branching off into a threefold division.

I. The meaning of being the sons of God: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God."

II. Our ignorance of our future: "It doth not yet appear what we shall be."

III. The statement that the sight of and communion with Christ will, in this future, transform us into likeness with Him: "When He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is."

I. And first of the phrase, "sons of God." "Be-

loved, now are we the sons of God." The analogy between the world of spirit and the world of matter, between the phenomena of nature and the soul of man, is a commonplace of preachers. And it is no wonder. Literature teems with it; art symbolizes it; and science, according to some, would resolve the two spheres into one.

Take, for instance, the analogy which first comes into my mind. Life as a river. The tiny streamlet issuing from some undiscoverable spring in a mountain, and gathering force as it is joined here and there by some neighbouring rivulet; gaining clearness or muddiness, depth or shallowness, according to the nature of the soil over which it hurries; reflecting on its bosom the varied scenes which in its stranger course its confining banks present to it; now dashing downwards in cataract, now seemingly slumbering in deep and subtle pools, loth to move on, and yet all the time, with one determining purpose, making its way towards the boundless ocean, to be merged in it for ever.

Is this a mere imagery of the life of man, a playful fancy of poetic temperament; or is it not, after all, one way, and that not the untruest way, of expressing the inner meaning of human life—of yours, for instance, and of mine? Our first tiny appearance on this earthly scene; the gathering of our habits, our powers, our characteristics, from association with

others; the flow of our earthly existence, now seemingly slow, now fast, according as joy transfigures our life, or monotony and sorrow dull it; and all the while one resistless, inevitable course, on to the spanless and undiscovered future beyond, which we call death and eternity.

And not less in the change of season—in the glad glow of summer suns; in the wild autumn skies, and the pattering leaf betokening decay; in the cold stillness of the winter shroud, and in the teeming resurrection of universal spring;—in such, and countless thousand other ways, does Nature seem to prove her relationship with us, that we are all one mould cast by the hand of the same Creator. The quickening pulse of Nature stirs our pulse into activity; her moods, variable as the chequered shadows that wave over the breast of the cornfield, are our moods; her sorrows, our sorrows; her joys, our joys.

Thus then we may, and, as a matter of fact, do, look upon ourselves as sons of God by *creation*, not least in virtue of our kinship with Nature.

But Christianity, as an additional factor in human history, moves us one step onwards. She teaches that we are also sons of God by *redemption;* that is, by the at-one-ment and reconciliation of man to God, and of God to man, which the Man-God, Christ Jesus, wrought for us on the cross of Calvary. As then, from one view of life we claim kinship with God

through Nature, so from another point of view we aspire to sonship with God through Christ.

And it is because, before Christ came into the world, there was only one link, and not two, between God and His creatures; because that one link, the link of nature, was very loosely held and imperfectly recognized by the mass of mankind, and disjointed or entangled, as well it might be, by the pre-Christian thinker; it is because to us as Christians the second link, the link of personal attachment and relationship through the sacrifice of Christ, has been indissolubly forged;—it is, I say, for these reasons that we, as Christians, in a sense far fuller of meaning than even the noblest and profoundest prophet, thinker, or sage of old, can declare that we are "all His children," the "sons of God."

II. But, secondly, our ignorance of our future: "it doth not yet appear what we shall be."

It is the peculiarity of many, if not of most, of the deep sayings of the Bible, that they seem to bear different meanings, and sometimes even to state truths contrary to each other and to experience, when presented from different points of view; just as the facets of a diamond flash out different lustres according to the light in which they are held.

So it is with the words before us. We all of us know, morally speaking, that we are creatures of habit; that in youth the formation of character

depends on particular single acts; that, as we grow older, the strength of these acts and habits grows more and more definite and difficult to destroy; that custom becomes, as philosophy tells us, more than second nature, nature itself; that the force of habit, though in a child as soft and brittle as the daisy-chain with which it fetters itself in play, yet, when the monotony and stiffness of manhood and age creep over us, so enchains our souls that we cannot, though we fain would, break through the iron bonds which encompass and straiten our life. The experience of every individual here to-day tells us that this is our life-history; habit insensibly moving onward, developing, permeating our being, and, like the perpetual trickling of the drop on the stony rock, hollowing out and stereotyping our character.

Is it then, you may ask, to be supposed that in our future life, in this world or hereafter, we shall be transformed, by some mysterious process, into different men, with different powers, different feelings, different capacities for enjoyment or for pain, different ways of looking on things around us and on ourselves? Does not all analogy, you say, prove to us the contrary? As the tree falls, doth it not so lie? Do grapes come of thorns, or figs of thistles?

And if all this be true, is not, we may say, this text untrue? Shall we not easily know what manner of men we shall be, by knowing what we are now, and what we have been in the past?

And I answer, all this is true; it *is* true that habit enchains and enslaves us; it *is* true that, like as every generation of men is the legitimate successor and outcome of the habits and life of the preceding one, so too of individuals, the child is father of the man, and we, each of us, shall be to-morrow the aggregate of all that we are to-day, and all that we have been yesterday; and it is most true of all that in consequence of all this an indefinitely great responsibility rests on us for every action committed or omitted, since it becomes another link in the formation of our soul's character. All this I admit.

But I pause here and ask, Does a single one of us know what we really are, and what we really have been? If we do, I confess that this text is inaccurate, and that we can know what manner of men we shall be in the undiscovered future. But no; not one of us knows himself, what he is.

"Know thyself," says the Greek teacher, "then shalt thou know other men"—a great inoperative proverb, never acted upon.

No! deep enough down in his own heart no man ever delves—not one.

Look at the man or woman of pleasure, drifting through life on the stream of fashion, with the rudder-lines of purpose hanging loosely from his hands. This is not his true, his buried self; there is an indefinite capacity for good, undeveloped nobility of character

lying beneath this sham exterior. This is not what he *is*; this is not his *life*.

See the man of business or of trade pursuing his daily routine of occupation, absorbed in the petty difficulties and worries of his calling; earning, as he ought, by the sweat of his brow, his daily bread. This is not the man; this is not his life; this is not what he *is*, but only what he seems, this hard-headed or hard-handed son of toil.

See the theologian, the politician, the scholar, immersed (so thinks the world) in the intricacy of party squabbles, in tricks to catch the breeze of popular favour or notoriety, with blinded eyesight poring over the subtleties of world-forgotten lore. These are not the *men*; these are not what they *are*; these are merely the picturesque, unreal phantoms of what is within them; these are not their real and inner hidden *life*.

No! it is only when the roar of seeming life is quiet within us, when the dial of time brings round for us some holy season, as now, in which we can pause in our headlong rush towards eternity; when perhaps some calamity, the loss of one near and dear to us, makes all the pulses of our being slow; when some change of circumstances, perhaps loss of home, or parting from our native land, brings us face to face with the nakedness of life, and we get rid of the numbing power of association, of the crust of habit

which has concealed from ourselves our own reality;—it is then, and then, alas! only in an imperfect and far-off sense, that we catch some faint glimpse of what we are and whither we are going.

Have we not felt sometimes the resurrection of seemingly dead feelings, dead emotions which have lain decaying for years like dank leaves in an autumn forest, and suddenly start again into quick life and luxuriance; how memories, perhaps, of past deeds and misdeeds rise spectre-like to haunt us; how undefinable, unspeakable, yearnings after a higher communion with God transfigure for a brief space our earthly existence, and the spirit searches into itself?

These moments, and such as these, are *life*. All else are unrealities, the mere fleeting phenomena of existence, which we, the citizens of a far-off country, grasp, perchance, and sometimes blindly mistake for life itself.

And with this unreal, imperfect knowledge of what we are now, nay, generally in utter dark ignorance of it, does it not follow that far less can we forecast the years either in this our earthly pilgrimage or in the hereafter beyond the grave, so as to catch even the glimmer of the manner of men we shall be?

III. But thirdly, the sight of and communion with Christ will transform us into likeness with Him: "We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is."

A strange conclusion at first sight, truly; and we are inclined to ask, Do we usually, by mere gazing at an object, become like that object? We may gaze for years at a beautiful picture without getting any nearer the original. And yet, on reflection, surely we grant this at least to be true even in a material sense, that we do, each of us, bear on our faces the marks of what we do, if not of what we are. There are many of us who pride ourselves on our capacity of judging in this respect. We can, we say, generally judge accurately of the occupation of any stranger whom we happen to meet, without the aid of distinguishing uniform or dress. The clergyman, the scholar, the soldier, the lawyer, the tradesman, carry each on his own person some evidence which will give us hints, if not knowledge, of his own particular calling, so that there comes to be more than an accidental connection between a person and his pursuit.

"Refinement of face," "thoughtfulness of expression," "air of good breeding,"—what are these phrases but admissions that the character of a man's ordinary thoughts is reflected, as in a mirror, with more or less accuracy on his countenance.

And more than this, a study of physiology will tell us that two persons who are mutually attached, who live together, who have the same pursuits and the same thoughts in common, not only become alike in

mental characteristics, but actually grow into remarkable resemblance in face and expression.

And a study of natural history tells us that certain animals grow so like their environment in colour, that you cannot distinguish between animate and inanimate nature, and that the caterpillar, for instance, becomes the colour of the leaf it feeds upon. A very striking analogy of the words of the text, "We shall become like Him, because we shall see Him as He is."

Yes, just as we nourish the belief that the little children who sit on our knees, fresh wrought from the treasure-house of God, bear on their faces some trace of the heaven from which they came, so we dare to believe that the Divine Likeness, implanted at the dawn of creation in the life of man ("Let us make man in our image"), still lives—deep down it may be, darkened it may be, nearly stifled, but still *there*, in the soul of every one in this congregation; nay, in the soul of every man, woman, or child, dead, living, or as yet concealed in the womb of time, wherever born, of whatever race or creed; that some particle of the Divine still lingers in the life of even the most abandoned sinner, some sparks of the divine energy, some pulse of God beats, low it may be, but still beats, in the life of every soul whom He hath made.

Yes, that there exists a part of the Divine in man, I for one dare not disbelieve. We are the sons of God, and we shall be more and more conformed to the like-

ness of Christ in the hereafter, if so be that we will look upon Him and have communion with Him; for then He, the heavenly Magnet, will draw out of us by His presence, all the God-like nature which lies dormant in our souls.

And if we are sons of God, if we in the hereafter, by gazing on Him, by communion with Him, are to be conformed to His likeness, then should our lives be to us those of "dumb, driven cattle," and not those of "heroes in the strife"? Are we to plough our lives in the water, leaving no furrow—a little wave breaking on the shore, and then no vestige of our existence left?

A great preacher says, "We are what the past made us; the results of the past are ourselves. The perishable emotions, the momentary acts of bygone years, are the scaffolding on which we build what we are. As the tree is fertilized by its own broken branches and fallen leaves, and grows out by its own decay, so is the soul of man ripened out of broken hopes, and blighted affections."

Yes, life out of death! health out of decay! This should be the teaching of the resurrection of Christ, the rising on "stepping-stones of our dead selves to higher things."

As we are the sons of God, as we shall be transformed into likeness with Christ, let us *do* something, let us *be* something, in life. We, surely—we, heirs of heaven, and co-heirs with Christ—have been called

into being on this earth not to lead a life of dull, passionless inaction, a life absorbed in grovelling gains, in frivolity or discontent, but rather to leave below us, as far as in us lies, the unrealities of earthly existence, and to fix our eyes ever on those eternal realities, the communion with God the Father, His Word and His Works; the communion with that Christ Whose cross no longer for us stands on earth, but, as to the Roman emperor of old, hangs high in heaven; communion with His Spirit, through Whose aid alone we are enabled to show ourselves true sons of God now in this dark world, and to see Him as He is, and be transformed in His likeness in that hereafter when He appears among the sons of men, and the day breaks full and the shadows flee away.

## SERMON VIII.

### The Heritage of Suffering.

PREACHED AT MORTIMER, HOSPITAL SUNDAY, 1882.

"*And as Jesus passed by, He saw a man which was blind from his birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither did this man sin, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.*"—JOHN ix. 1-3.

No single incident, perhaps, in the life of Christ as recorded in the pages of the Gospel narrative, opens out a series of reflections more varied in their suggestiveness and application than the story of which these words form the prelude. And though I propose to confine the chief part of my remarks this morning to the thoughts more immediately suggested by the text, it may not be uninteresting, nor without its bearing on our main subject, to touch lightly in passing on some of the more salient features of the whole story.

The miracle, indeed, performed on the man born blind is merely the hinge on which the door of history turns, and reveals to us a glimpse of the inner

chamber and furniture of mind which characterized some of the Jews of our Lord's day, and which, perhaps, may be not altogether unknown among the people in the times in which we live.

Notice, first, how the simplicity and straightforwardness of the healed man is brought out in sharp and impressive contrast to the sceptical sneers and subtle malice of the Pharisees. The latter are at their wits' end to discover some explanation satisfactory to their own self-complacency which may account for his restored vision. No ingenuity, however, can contest the facts. The identity of the man is beyond all reasonable dispute.

"Is not this he that sat and begged? Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he."

They are fairly baffled. Again and again they ply him with questions.

"The Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see."

There is a grand simplicity about this answer which deserves notice. No colouring or varnish in it stamps the man as a partisan of his Benefactor's cause. He is a witness who has a plain and straightforward story to tell, and no cross-examination can shake his consistency. Nor does a reference to his parents obtain for the Pharisees any explanation

which can account for the startling fact of the miracle. "We have no explanation to give," is their practical rejoinder; "ask the man himself."

And now notice how their venom grows more and more embittered in proportion as their inability to account for the fact becomes more apparent to themselves and others. And is it not always thus? Are not the bitterness and jealousy with which we condemn the views of an opponent generally a very correct measure nowadays of our ignorance on any subject on which we desire to be considered oracles. Bitter dogmatism is often another name for ignorance.

And so the Pharisees say, "Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner." That is, "Jesus is a mere blind organism in the hands of God; it is no merit to Him, therefore, that He should have performed this work of healing." And is not this a very modern feeling, too? When we see our neighbour praised by the world for a good deed, for some act of munificent charity or striking heroism, do not jealousy and envy turn the edge of universal praise by whispering, "It is merely his luck. It is the bare duty of a man in his position—but he—is a sinner. Give God the praise"?

But mark the healed man's answer—perhaps the most striking passage in the whole incident. There is a superb and yet homely irony in it. "Whether He be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that,

whereas I was blind, now I see." There was clearly no contradicting that. Whatever were Jesus' shortcomings, whatever the vices of the Benefactor, there is no doubt of the value of the benefit received. "Herein," says he, "is a marvellous thing, that a sinner should open the eyes of the blind." Here, you say, is a sinner, and yet, according to universal consent, God does not heed the prayers of one whose life is a flagrant violation of His laws.

I think that there is little doubt after this that the man left off with the best part of the argument; and that the Pharisees felt this to be the case is equally indisputable; for they did what many among us do when we get the worst of the argument—they began to abuse their opponent, and finally turned him out of the synagogue.

And if I were asked what seemed to be the prominent feature of this story, I should reply—the uncharity of the Pharisees, the grossness of attributing the best actions to the worst motives, and the subtlety of attempting to detract from the gratitude due to the Benefactor, not by underrating the value of the benefit received (for this would have been a clumsy device), but by insinuating that the gratitude ought more properly to be diverted into another channel.

And do we need to go very far from our own doors to find modern instances of this bitterness, prejudice, uncharity? Starting from the narrow basis of our

own self-sufficiency, do we not often distort to the worse the good actions of those who stand apart from us on any given subject. Wrapt in supreme satisfaction with our own views of things, we deprecate or condemn with severity or scorn the actions of our neighbours—actions which a less inflamed prejudice and healthier heart would recognize as springing, perhaps, from nobler impulses and purer views of duty than our own.

Our souls are sometimes like those concave mirrors of Smyrna, where every object reflected becomes distorted and caricatured. Look on the large world around us. Every action done from the most conscientious motives is dragged through the mire of obloquy; every little mistake committed by our neighbour, as insignificant as the mote in the sunlight, is magnified into the proportions of a beam. I hear the whispered word, I see the shrug of deprecation, the significant look more eloquent than any word; I see them smite and kill, and characters lie slain by the malarious breath of calumny. I see class embittered against class, neighbour against neighbour, Christian against Christian. Rancour and uncharity go hand in hand. The serpent, with venomous tooth of spite, and slander, and malice, and gossip, fastening its fangs perhaps in the midst of this congregation. And I hear the voice of irony coming down through the ages—

"See how these Christians love one another!"

No, no, think not that the Pharisee is the creature of one particular age, in one small section of God's earth. He is alive still, flaunting in the midst of our society, perhaps lodged in many of our hearts, as rancorously hostile to the progress of Christianity to-day as his prototype of nineteen centuries ago was to the teaching and the healing of the great Physician.

But to come more immediately to the words of our text. "His disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither did this man sin, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."

Now, the words of Christ are not like the words of other men; they are not merely intended to give force to the circumstances of the case He is treating, but they embody principles applicable to human life in all times.

And here, then, we have two subjects of contemplation.

I. The statement that physical suffering is not merely the result of moral evil.

II. Suffering as an opportunity to man for the development of good.

And first, of the statement that physical suffering is not merely the result of sin. In all primitive peoples this was only dimly and partially understood.

In one of the most horrible tragedies of ancient times the hero kills his father, and shares the throne with his mother, unconscious of his relationship; but he is punished by the gods just as much as if his awful misfortune were a premeditated crime.

But Christ in this passage teaches us that there are certain evils which fall upon a man over which he has no control, and He seems to divide suffering into two kinds: one, which is the punishment of sin; the other, which is either the result of ignorance of the laws of nature, or which springs from causes beyond human control.

The drunkard leads a life of intoxication; his punishment is the trembling hand, the nerveless frame, the shattered constitution. The slanderer and liar gains as his position the hate of men and the tongue which is set on fire of hell. The sensualist gains as his due reward a body in decay and a soul in ruins; a temple, once the abode of the Holy Spirit of God, now a ruined shrine, where foul and loathsome things congregate; the craving for deeper and deeper draughts of iniquity when the appetite to enjoy is gone for ever.

Sin, and you will suffer, is a law that cannot be reversed.

But suffering also comes to us, says Christ, from causes beyond control, not always from wilful disobedience. The lightning-fires love to have scope

and play, and turn their death-strokes on the just as well as the unjust. The ocean-flood snatches away the God-fearing man overwhelmed in his foundering bark; while the murderer perhaps sails safe over the waves to pursue fresh iniquity. Fever strikes down the good man's child; while the sinner is unrepentant and yet scathless.

Yes, suffering is the common heritage of our race. It is the woof woven into the warp of human life. "Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward."

Human life—what are men's hopes and fears, anxieties and struggles, but suffering? Human life—to what shall we liken it? A broken sleep, the withering grass, a thin stream flowing between two mighty oceans, on whose banks, as of late we heard it, there is for a while the noise and hum of contending hosts; but the stream of life flows calmly on till it loses itself in the vast waters of eternity.

Human life—to what shall we liken it? "It is a young trooper, riding into battle blithe and gay, in all the bravery of soul and dress, and at the end the same soldier riding back, weary, stained, and wounded, a defeated and shattered man." It is the butterfly sporting on the summer's day; but when the sun has sunk low behind the trees, its life is done. Yesterday it was not; to-morrow it will not be: God has made it flutter for a day. Lost hopes, baffled ambitions, and, saddest of all, outgrown affections,

what are they but tents of a night, which are folded and put away with the morrow's dawn?

Look around you. What says the world of nature to-day? We see in the waning year the decaying leaves sink down one by one, till the heaps below are rich with the spoil of a whole season's vegetation; the wild sky reels beneath the moaning wind, and we are moving down to the dark silence of a winter shroud. Look! it is an emblem of human life.

Look around you. One man fills his banquet halls with the glare and noise of splendour; another tosses the while on the bed of suffering; but above all the quiet stars of God steal forth, shedding a profound calm, and there is stillness on the everlasting hills.

These are no mere similes; it is nature testifying to the truth of suffering.

Have such thoughts of human life ever come into your mind—that life is a little piece cut out of eternity for man to suffer in?

Have you never felt it when you have watched by the bedside of a dying child, or wife, or sister, or mother, as they lay tossing on their bed of pain, and, as the end draws near, have bent over them to catch their last faint accents of a hope beyond the grave?

Have you never lost a friend, sundered from you by long seas and half a world, whose soul has been your soul, whose sympathies have been your sympathies,

and from whom to be torn away has shaken your nature to its foundations?

It is at times like these that we understand what Christ meant when He said that suffering need not necessarily be the result of sin. It is at times like these that we re-echo the voice of the Preacher: "All flesh is grass;" "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

But secondly, Christ teaches us in this text that suffering is the opportunity to every man for the development of good. Suffering has a magic power over the sufferer himself. Suffering is the great teacher. If ever a man is in earnest, it is when he is in pain. As sweetness comes from the bruised rose-leaf, so does suffering refine the mind, and elevate the soul of the sufferer.

"Sorrow," says one, "is the discipline of the Cross, the school for all that is highest in us."

As sometimes in a dead man's face we trace his likeness to a relation unperceived before, so to the mind of the sufferer there returns some of that sweetness of divine character which was his original self, but of which the buffets and struggles with the world has well-night reft him. The curtains of life are, as it were, thrown back, the shams of the world assume their true proportions, the figure of Christ stands out clear and distinct against the dreary landscape, and heaven is seen to be the only reality.

But suffering not only elevates and ennobles the

patient endurer of afflictions of mind, body, and estate, but it also has a transforming power on the relations of the world at large. It is the great teacher, the one factor of human life which gives it a cohering force, and which, by its inseparable connection with our common existence, binds us more than anything else together with a sense of universal brotherhood.

The tumult of political passion, of social jealousies, of individual hatred, are hushed in the presence of common disaster and common woe. Whether it be the inspiring spectacle of a great nation weeping over the ashes of a dead patriot, or the ravages of some mighty river, in scorn of human skill, sweeping away the labours of years, and burying thousands of homesteads in its engulfing flood, the result is the same. There is the same spontaneous outburst of human sympathy.

But suffering teaches something more than this. It is the field for self-denial. If we could imagine a world without suffering, where sin brought none of its inevitable consequences by poisoning the springs of life at its fount, I suspect that we should have this one great virtue the less—the virtue of self-denial; for without suffering, humanly speaking, self-denial would find no scope. And in the great mystery of evil, which hangs so thickly over our eyes when we attempt to peer into the hidden things of God, we

may dare—may we not?—to trace the exercise of this virtue as one of His compensating blessings for the misery that darkens the world.

It is because the great cloud of human suffering is so thick and lowering that the single star of self-denial shines so beautiful and so clear; a star which, if human life were unflecked by cloud, we might well surmise would be dimmed in the sunny radiance of universal happiness.

Self-denial, yes, whether in purse or by individual energy, or associated effort, or (hardest of all) by the control of passion or self-will—self-denial, though it is not, remember, Christianity itself, is the great purifier, making clean the innermost shrine of the human heart for the reception there of the image of Jesus Christ. For it is by the ladder of self-denial, erected against the walls of suffering, that we climb up into the presence of the Son of God. It is the one idea which was so startlingly novel to the world in the teaching of Christ; the one idea which in His lifetime humanly speaking, won over converts to His cause, and frustrated for so long the efforts of His enemies; the one idea which has been acknowledged by the opponents of Christianity in all ages to be the grand, inspiring, enduring truth of Christ's teaching and example, because it touched, as only the Son of God could touch, that chord of human brotherhood which has thrilled ever since the hearts of men—the idea

that human suffering is to be the means and opportunity for the development of good, that the primeval curse once levied against man should be converted into an eternal blessing.

Two sentences out of the Gospel sum up the life of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" "He went about doing good."

And may I read this as our lesson, yours and mine, for the coming year?—Is it our life as yet? will it be ours? shall we go about doing good?

If not—and no act is colourless for good or for ill—it must be either a blessing or a cursing to our fellowmen; if not, this year we shall go about doing evil.

Time comes to us, as the Roman legate came to his enemy, holding concealed in his folded gown peace and war, blessing and cursing, goodness and ignobility, and says to us, "Choose which you will have." And if we delay to answer, if we halt between two opinions, attempting to serve God and Mammon, we may find that peace is no longer possible.

But what shall we say of those who have beyond all doubt yielded up their lives a precious sacrifice to the cause of Christ, who have made out of suffering, whether bodily or mental, an opportunity for the development of good?

Behold them, men and women, allured by no dazzling hope of fame or universal praise, labouring

among the poor, watching over the sick-bed, smoothing the restless pillow, tending the maimed, the halt, and the blind for the sake of Christ.

Behold them in their home circle, smoothing differences, reconciling enmities, subduing evil passions, speaking no words that can do hurt, so that even the selfish, the worldly, the sensual, bend to the magic of their Christ-like influence.

Servants of God—nay, sons, shall I not call them? for not as servants have they known and wrought their Father's innermost will.

Yes, through such as these do we learn to believe in the noble and good that are gone; a great multitude which no man can number, of every kingdom, and people, and age, and clime; a multitude unknown to fame—the self-sacrificing, the fervent, the heroic soldiers of the cross of Christ. "These are they that have not defiled their garments; they shall walk before the Lamb, for they are worthy."

Yes, as in a vision, I behold the thrones set and the books opened, amid choirs of attending angels and the thronging army of martyrs and prophets; I see this unknown, unnamed throng standing at the right hand of God; and I hear the voice of the great King saying to them the words of welcome to their home, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world."

# SERMON IX.

## Naaman the Syrian.

PREACHED AT BRADFIELD PARISH CHURCH, SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT, 1883.

"*So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the Name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.*"—2 KINGS v. 9–12.

THERE is a large class of excellent people to whom the description of the characters and biographies of men portrayed in the Bible present themselves like so many dissolving views, interesting and impressive for the moment, but possessing for them no interest of a permanent kind, as having in their eyes no points of contact with the circumstances and needs and responsibilities of their own lives. Thus the worthies of the Old Testament appear mere puppets in the hands of the great Artificer, while the reader has merely a sort

of vague feeling that, if he were thrown into the circumstances and temptations of the men who are described as sinning against the will of God, he at any rate would not have been so perverse or ignorant or iniquitous as they. And, I suppose, this unsatisfactory way of regarding the Bible has its foundation in a mistaken piety, which invests the volume of God's Word, and the good and bad characters in it, with a sort of magic halo, having no similarity with the ordinary atmosphere of life, and which forbids us to enter into any minute examination of its subject matter, as we should naturally do with any other history or biography which we happen to read. Thus it is that we fail to perceive any special reference in Scripture characters to our own surroundings and associations.

Now, this attitude of mind, though in some respects worthy, is, I say, unfortunate. Let us this morning attempt to throw off some of this mystic reserve, and see whether we cannot find in this story of Naaman some real points of contact, some real practical lessons for ourselves.

I do not propose to go into all the incidents of the story, which is, of course, familiar enough. I select only the points most obviously to be gained from the verses I have quoted.

Briefly put, they are these: Elisha's recipe for Naaman's cure; Naaman's anger and its cause.

Now, first of all, notice that Elisha does not come

out to him, but merely sends a messenger. This was naturally very provoking to a man in Naaman's high position. Here he was at the door of a poor prophet, having come all the way from Syria with a malignant disease, the nature of which cut him off from the society of his fellows. His heart probably beat high with the hope of gaining relief, if not cure, at the hands of one who had evidently some reputation for healing in the eyes of his countrymen. And yet this doctor, to whom he has taken the trouble of coming, does not even condescend to see him! What an outrage! Here is all Syria sighing over the leprosy of the great minister of the great king, and yet an obscure subject of a petty tributary prince does not seem to have the slightest knowledge of or interest in the great personage whom he is treating so unceremoniously. "Behold, I thought he would surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." A grand opportunity for the prophet; a splendid dramatic incident for history to record; and yet the whole affair is treated as absolutely trivial by Elisha! Would not such as these have been Naaman's thoughts?

And now to put ourselves in Naaman's place. After all, was he much more foolish than ourselves? Is it not just about the most common thing to imagine that our own particular circumstances and

worries and grievances are of supreme importance to others; that no one has ever had such trouble or such circumstances before; and do we not, like Naaman, get very much annoyed when we find that we are not so interesting or so important as we imagined?

Few of us understand how little we are in the world; that even the people in the next parish hardly know of our existence, and that people ten miles off have scarcely heard of our parish; that we are not really wanted even by those who know us best; and when the grave closes over us, and when the tears of wife or children are dry, our little world will say, "Poor fellow! he is gone," and will move on as before, without our death making any perceptible change. It requires a great deal of training in the world to learn that family reverence is less than village renown; that village renown is not the same thing as provincial fame, or provincial fame as national celebrity.

I think, then, that we may learn a lesson of true practical humility for ourselves in the fact that Elisha did not go out of his house to perform a celebrated cure, or even to salute the Syrian magnate.

But, again, observe the cure. How strikingly simple! I say nothing now of the lesson we might profitably draw from it; namely, that it is the attitude of mind in the sufferer, rather than the elaborate character of the means employed, that produces the

most radical cure of physical as well as moral evil. Our object rather now is to show how provokingly simple, and therefore inadequate, it seemed to the mind of Naaman to go and wash in Jordan seven times. A pretty remedy, truly, for a disease whose malignity has baffled the skill of the ablest physicians! It was an insult to any man's understanding! Now here, again, let us learn for ourselves. The leprosy of Naaman is a type of moral sin, malignant, deadly, contagious. The man, woman, or child who had that disease was a social outcast, banned with every mark of abhorrence when it was discovered, as indeed, all sin is sooner or later; and yet cold water is the cure. A great truth! No violent remedies for virulent disease! However bad a man may be, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it is better, except when society demands otherwise, to try to develop the God within him than to lash the devil out of him. A great truth, and a practical hint for the education of your children. When they have been wicked, don't cajole or frighten them by fear of hell and the horrid burning pit, but attract them to be good by telling them of the love of God, and by the examples of your own lives.

And, again, I see an application in this story of Naaman which may help us to estimate the value of what are called religious revivals. Leprosy was not cut out with a knife; if it had been, it would

have grown again, and moreover the sore would have festered and mortified, and the last state of that man would have been worse than the first. No, it was to be washed away gradually (seven times), by pure water; an apt imagery, surely, of that quiet, pure, comprehensive Christianity which changes a man's life, not by leaps and bounds, not by cries and war-whoops, but by a stream of continually flowing Christian teaching and example. I do not say that emotional religion is not valuable in certain cases, but there is a law which applies to the moral and spiritual, as well as to the physical constitution of man, viz., that drastic and violent remedies, when applied to a frame weakened by disease, bring with them their inevitable reaction, leaving the patient in worse plight than before.

But what says Naaman in the next verse? "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?" That is, "Supposing I do try this extraordinary, and I may say insultingly simple remedy, yet Elisha might have suggested my own native rivers, and not some obscure stream which is entirely foreign to me." I think here we may extract another thought upon which it may be of advantage to some of us to reflect. What have we here but that spirit of narrow-mindedness, which loves to work in its old grooves? Am I speaking in parables to some

among us here when I apply this to ourselves? Narrow-mindedness in objecting to a new method of management, or new point of view, a new organization, not because it is bad, but simply because we like the old ways. Now, error is wrought by want of heart as well as by want of head. It is not merely ignorance; it is obstinacy. I wonder whether it ever occurs to the blind adherent of old forms and routine to examine whether the basis on which he founds his affection for them be really sound, or whether the grumble with which he salutes the new suggestion be reasonable, and entirely such as Christ would approve—He Who, of all reformers that ever lived, was denounced as the most revolutionary. I wonder whether it occurs to a man like this to recollect that what he now objects to as being so pernicious, will, in a few days or months or years at latest, be settled into an established custom, without himself or his neighbours being any the worse for it? Is he quite sure that his own Abana and Pharpar are really better than the foreign Jordan?

But lastly, "Naaman turned and went away in a rage." We have nothing to do now with his subsequent change of purpose (of which, of course, we are glad), since we have limited ourselves to these few points in the story. But I think no one will deny that Naaman played rather a sorry and petty part in this course of action. He was doing a great injustice

to himself in not taking advantage of the chance of recovery on account of a fancied insult; he was, in fact, his own worst enemy. I suppose, however, that what really made him more angry than anything else was the unceremonious way in which Elisha behaved; that he did not help him, but told him to help himself. "I thought he would surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." The fact was that he had been so accustomed to be looked after and have everything done for him, that he did not understand it when Elisha mixed, as it were, insult—by not coming out, with injury—by telling him to help himself. And this condition of mind, this desire to be helped without helping ourselves, is one, I think, which is very much to be deplored. It argues a very low moral standpoint; it means, on the one hand, a truckling to people more powerful than ourselves, from whom we expect to get something, and a contempt for and insolence to people below us, from whom we can get nothing. It means a previous bad sort of training, which expects much and gives nothing; which looks to everything being done for us without doing anything for ourselves; which is peevish, irritable, discontented, when any privilege or succulent means of gain is taken away from us, though we never had any right to expect that such privilege should ever be accorded. I

say that this is a low moral state; it is the pauperizing and paralyzing of all the best instincts within us which make the life of man anything better than that of the beasts that perish.

Let us, then, leave Naaman here, and if a word of mine should strike home to any among us, let us leave him in character also, and change as he did at the exhortation of a servant. Let us shake off that spirit of peevish discontent which finds some cause to grumble at everything which those who minister to us may believe will most effectually cure our leprosy. Let us not, because we do not see their use, turn away in a rage and refuse to listen to the holy words which Sunday after Sunday are told us for our good, but let us put on that Christ-like spirit which seeks for unity rather than for differences, for comprehension rather than intolerance—the spirit of true, living, burning charity, which gives us thoughts worthy of ourselves and of our neighbours, and is the cord by which alone we can link heaven and earth together in our lives.

THE END.

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